

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY, CRIME AND SOCIAL MARGINALIZATION

Social and Political
Implications

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BY

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Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile.

— Albert Einstein

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Miguel Basto Pereira

INTRODUCTION

Scientific evidence shows that a set of family and psychosocial elements are risk factors for juvenile delinquency. Nonetheless, a meta-synthesis of factors predicting desistance from crime in juvenile offenders, which could play a central role in preventing crime, has never been done. This is not the only limitation. If adverse childhood experiences (ACE) are a unanimous risk factor for juvenile delinquency, the role of each early adverse experience on crime and social marginalization are almost unknown. Worldwide, the levels of effectiveness of justice interventions are not encouraging, despite the majority of legal frameworks having the aim of preventing recidivism and promote social integration. Moreover, when youths with justice involvement reach adulthood, very little is known about what dimensions should be intervened.

The purpose of this book is to advance knowledge about the role of psychosocial, legal, and family factors on persistence in crime and social marginalization in young adults with a history of juvenile delinquency. This work presents the main findings and policy implications from *The Portuguese Study on Delinquency and Social Marginalization*, (PSDSM) which are divided into five parts, each part corresponding to a published and/or submitted scientific article. Chapter 1 evaluates the long-term predictors of desistance from crime in adults with a history of juvenile delinquency; Chapter 2, explores the role of adverse childhood experiences (ACE) on juvenile justice involvement, persistence in crime, and

psychosocial problems; Chapter 3 examines the mechanisms involved in the link between ACE and delinquency; Chapter 4 explores the role of juvenile justice involvement and detention measures on psychosocial problems and persistence in crime during early adulthood; and, lastly, Chapter 5 evaluates the relation between adult psychosocial problems and criminal indicators in individuals with an official record of juvenile criminal offences (ORJC).

CHAPTER 1

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY, CRIME AND SOCIAL MARGINALIZATION: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. JUVENILE DELINQUENCY: THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Juvenile delinquency is a prevalent and concerning problem. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) most recent data from 50 countries showed that 232,041 juveniles were convicted for juvenile criminal acts in 2015 alone (UNODC, 2017). Moreover, evidence strongly suggests that the majority of individuals with adult criminal patterns had a past of juvenile delinquency (Farrington, 2003; Stouthamer-Loeber, Wei, Loeber, & Masten, 2004). However, juvenile delinquency has not only criminal implications but also relevant economic and social costs. Besides persistence in crime, several studies have shown a relationship between juvenile delinquency and school dropout (e.g., Sweeten, 2006), mental health problems (Rijo et al., 2016),

drugs and alcohol misuse (Bennett, Holloway, & Farrington, 2008; Bouchery, Harwood, Sacks, Simon, & Brewer, 2011), and unemployment (Verbruggen, Blokland, & Van der Geest, 2012).

Legally, juvenile delinquency is broadly characterized as the committing of illegal acts by minors (Moeller, 2001; Regoli, Hewitt, & DeLisi, 2011). Despite this legal definition of being dependent on cultural and political backgrounds (e.g., national laws), the age of adult criminal responsibility usually ranges between 16 and 18 years in Western countries, and the majority of serious, medium, or even low-seriousness antisocial behaviors (e.g., homicide, robbery, theft, domestic violence, aggression) are criminalized worldwide (Junger-Tas & Dünkler, 2009), creating a common background for international scientific-based evidence and policies.

Criminal life careers imply an economic burden for society in general. As shown by McCollister, French, and Fang (2010) and Welsh et al. (2008), crime causes a wide range of losses affecting victims (e.g., stolen items, medical treatments, trauma), taxpayers (e.g., police, courts, prisons), and insurance companies (e.g., value-ensured stolen items, medical treatments, or mental health services costs). In addition, the criminal careers themselves have a huge long-term economic impact on the offender and society as a whole, including a higher risk of drug misuse (Bennett et al., 2008), the replacement of productive and socially relevant activities for an illegal lifestyle (McCollister et al., 2010), and a higher risk of intergenerational perpetuation of a criminal lifestyle (e.g., Day, Bevc, Theodor, Rosenthal, & Duchesne, 2008). Cohen (1998) calculated that criminal careers of juveniles aged between 14 and 17 years cost from \$83,000 to \$335,000 for each juvenile offender, with an additional \$1.4 million being added when the juvenile criminal career persists into adulthood. More recently, Welsh et al. (2008), using the Pittsburgh

Cohort, estimated that the average victim cost per juvenile chronic offender, aged between 7 and 17 years, ranged from \$793,000 to \$861,000.

Therefore, due to the tremendous tangible and intangible costs of crime, preventing and stopping juvenile delinquency and adult criminal careers and promoting social inclusion are major scientific and political aims. One of the best ways to promote these ends is using evidence-based programs and politics. However, building programs to prevent recidivism and promote social inclusion implies a deep knowledge about the mechanisms leading to juvenile delinquency and cyclically promoting criminal behavior. However, as shown by Lipsey's (2009) meta-analysis, the intervention strategies range from being harmful (e.g., deterrence) to moderately effective in reducing recidivism (e.g., counseling). In Lipsey's (2009) meta-analysis, the most effective intervention for reducing recidivism among juvenile offenders was counseling, indicating a reduction of 13% for programs with this type of intervention. Despite the fact that a reduction of 13% implies a tremendous saving on social and economic costs and even human lives, this small percentage of reduction in recidivism suggests that the majority of mechanisms promoting recidivism are not being targeted in any of the current interventions, because the mechanisms responsible are unknown or unreachable.

1.2. FACTORS PREDICTING DESISTANCE FROM CRIME IN JUVENILE OFFENDERS: SCIENTIFIC GAPS AND SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

Over the last two decades, important long-term longitudinal studies have been conducted to evaluate the risk factors of crime desistance in adults with a history of juvenile delinquency. The *Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development* is

one of the best-known cohorts and followed 411 males, aged from 8 to 48, living in a working-class environment in South London (Farrington, Ttofi, & Coid, 2009). Out of the 411 males, 161 were convicted before the age of 20. The predictors of desistance from crime for young people between the ages of 8 and 18 were evaluated, and among several tens of variables evaluated, only hyperactivity, heavy drinking, low popularity, and harsh parental discipline negatively predicted desistance from crime in young offenders.

Likewise, the Pittsburgh Youth Study cohort followed a large sample of 850 boys from grades one, four, and seven, of whom approximately 500 were followed and evaluated at 6-month intervals (Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, Van Kammen, & Farrington, 1991). After 15 years, Loeber, Pardini, Stouthamer-Loeber, and Raine (2007) conducted a study analyzing risk and promotive factors of desistance from crime during late adolescence and young adulthood (17–20 years of age). Among a large range of different factors evaluated from different sources, only high interpersonal callousness, high peer delinquency, and high tobacco use negatively predicted desistance from crime and factors positively promoting desistance from crime were not found.

In addition, Moffitt (1993, 2006) theorized two typologies of youths to explain desistance from crime in juvenile delinquents: life-course-persistent trajectories versus adolescent limited. Individuals with life-course-persistent trajectories are characterized by a set of high-risk behaviors during childhood, including neuropsychological variations (e.g., cognitive deficits, hyperactivity), social and interpersonal problems (e.g., poverty, poor relations with people), and family dysfunctionality (e.g., disrupted family bounds, inadequate parenting). Those youths tend to have marginal lives, extended at least until the middle of adulthood and affecting several domains, including criminal

and addictive behavior, family violence perpetration, and problems with employment.

In contrast, adolescent-limited trajectories should be more prevalent, resulting from a “maturity gap,” characterized by the youngster who wants to win autonomy from their parents and take a role as an adult. Those youths are more vulnerable to mimicking their peers’ delinquent lifestyle and adopting delinquent behaviors during adolescence. On entering adulthood, they usually adopt a conventional lifestyle desisting from crime. The Dunedin longitudinal study, a New Zealand cohort following 1037 boys and girls from the age of 3 until adulthood, tested this hypothesis. Twenty-three percent of the participants were classified as adolescent limited during childhood while 7% of the sample were classified as life course persistent in crime (Moffitt & Caspi, 2001). The study was conducted by Moffitt, Caspi, Harrington, and Milne (2002) when the sample reached the age of 26, and they found that children characterized as life-course persistent have higher levels of criminal convictions, including violent criminal convictions, mental health problems, substance dependence, and work problems. The analysis conducted with the Dunedin longitudinal study supports Moffitt’s (2006) hypothesis to some extent, showing the relevance of this topology in explaining different trajectories. Nonetheless, it did not explain completely the phenomenon of desistance from crime as a whole, for two main reasons: (1) A significant percentage of youths classified as nondelinquent or adolescent limited also have criminal convictions and a marginal lifestyle through life; and (2) some adults classified as life-course persistent during childhood did not persist with crime or with a marginal lifestyle during adulthood.

In contrast to Terrie Moffitt, Laub and Sampson (2001) described desistance as a: “variety of complex processes — developmental, psychological, and sociological — and thus there are several factors associated with it” (p. 3), and

both Kazemian (2007) and Laub and Sampson (2001) argued that, instead of a topological preselection of different trajectories, the study of desistance should include a vision of desistance as a process occurring during the lifetime, not only because the majority of criminals stop their criminal activity during their forties but also because a set of psychosocial variables during adulthood are relevant in explaining those changes in criminal careers (Sampson & Laub, 2003). In fact, while several factors are consistent in explaining juvenile delinquency (Braga, Gonçalves, Basto-Pereira, & Maia, 2017; Hawkins et al., 2000), such as abuse, neglect, drug misuse, and antisocial peers, few predictors explain desistance from crime in juvenile delinquents. In this regard, Loeber et al. (2007) concluded that both persisters and desisters were similar in a large set of psychosocial problems, including educational, employment, and substance use problems.

Nonetheless, Terrie Moffitt's work is of tremendous relevance, showing the importance of genetic and environmental factors during childhood and their predictive ability regarding persistence in crime and social marginalization. In fact, Sampson and Laub (2005) did not reject the importance of childhood experiences and characteristics on criminal behavior. Their work, using an update of Glueck's longitudinal study, with a cohort composed of 52 juvenile delinquents aged from 7 to 17 and up to 70 years, found that childhood and adolescent variables (e.g., extroversion, adventurousness, egocentricity, or violent temper tantrums) are predictors of adult crime through life. To sum up, works of Laub and Sampson (2001) and Sampson and Laub (2005) appear to suggest that childhood and adolescent factors seem to be the first step, but never the only or the last path, in understanding the process of desistance from crime.

1.3. PREVALENCE OF EARLY ADVERSE EXPERIENCES AND ASSOCIATIONS WITH PSYCHOSOCIAL DYSFUNCTION AND ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR

In 1998, Felitti et al. (1998) published one of the first studies to address the prevalence and correlates of childhood adverse experiences. The study, conducted in a large sample ($N=9508$), using the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Questionnaire, addressed not only maltreatment but also a set of household dysfunctional experiences (e.g., member imprisoned, parental substance use). More than half of the participants were victims of at least one serious adverse experience and 11.1% were victims of abuse (physical and/or sexual and/or emotional abuse) in the first 18 years of life. Childhood adverse experiences were interrelated and strongly related to a set of psychosocial problems, including alcoholism, drug use, psychopathology, and adult risk behavior. Those concerning results created a new line of research and in the last 18 years a set of studies have been conducted in order to explore the prevalence and the effects of serious abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction. One of the most complete and comprehensive studies was conducted by Kessler et al. (2010) and included data from 21 countries in 5 continents ($N=51,945$). The World Mental Health Survey was used to evaluate 12 childhood or adolescent adverse experiences. In terms of serious household dysfunction, the prevalences of parental mental illness (6.2%), parental substance disorder (4.0%), parental criminal behavior (2.9%), family violence (6.5%), parental death (12.5%), parental divorce (6.6%), other parental loss (5.1%), physical illness (3.1%), and economic adversity (3.4%) were presented. Maltreatment was also evaluated, with the most prevalent category being physical abuse (8.0%), followed by neglect (4.4%) and sexual abuse (1.6%). This study also showed that

childhood adversities were strongly interrelated and associated with all classes of mental disorders during the lifetime.

More recently, the Stockholm study (Björkenstam et al., 2016) supported these findings and particularly highlighted the relevance of adversity beyond maltreatment. The study explored the role of household dysfunction in a large community sample ($N=96,399$). Fifty-one percent of the sample were victims of at least one serious household dysfunction, and the cumulative exposure to childhood adversity was related to the level of utilization of psychiatric care. Likewise, Dube et al. (2003), in a study conducted in California, USA ($N=8613$), found a relationship between drug initiation and a cumulative exposure to early adverse experiences. The prevalence of childhood adverse experiences in this sample was very high (67.3%). Moreover, more than a quarter of the sample reported having been victims of three or more serious early adverse experiences before the age of 18 (26.3%).

In Portugal, three important studies explored the prevalence and correlates of childhood adverse experiences (limited to abuse or neglect). The first study evaluated parental reports of physical and emotional abuse (Machado, Gonçalves, Matos, & Dias, 2007) in a sample of 2391 parents, with the commitment of physical abusive acts being reported by 12.3% of the parents, while 22.4% of the parents reported having been perpetrators of emotional abusive acts. Another relevant Portuguese study was conducted by Figueiredo et al. (2004) in a sample of 1000 parents. About 81.6% of parents self-reported having been victims of physical abuse and 2.6% of sexual abuse during childhood or adolescence, and this study highlighted the particularly important intergenerational role of maltreatment. In the last few years, the study conducted in Portugal by Pinto and Maia (2013) in a sample of youths with documented maltreatment found positive associations between the level of childhood adverse

experiences and a set of health problems including psychopathology, physical complaints, and health risk behaviors. In addition, the study conducted by Ribeiro, Basto-Pereira, and Maia (2016) showed that youths with parents identified by the Child Protective Services (CPS) as mentally ill have almost double the prevalence of psychopathological symptoms five years later than other youths with only documented maltreatment.

In line with previous findings regarding victimization experiences (see Mesquita, Basto-Pereira, & Maia, 2017; Pinto, Correia, & Maia, 2014), the prevalence of the presence and type of childhood adverse experiences ranges from study to study, for various reasons, including differences between official documents and self-reported information, longitudinal and retrospective design, the types of surveys, and cultural differences between countries, among others. Nonetheless, the majority of studies coincide regarding the high prevalence of adverse experiences during childhood and adolescence, as well as the association between the cumulative effects of these experiences and serious long-term mental health problems.

A growing body of evidence related to adverse experiences and delinquency has been published in the last few years, particularly with regard to maltreatment. A meta-analysis conducted in 2016 by Braga et al. (2017) included 33 prospective longitudinal studies ($N = 23,973$ youths). This study showed maltreatment globally, and each type of maltreatment (neglect, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse) significantly predicted the risk of aggressive antisocial behavior during adolescence. The most important predictor of aggressive antisocial behavior was child sexual abuse. Nonetheless, few studies have been conducted to evaluate the impact of childhood adverse experiences beyond abuse and neglect on antisocial behavior outcomes, including juvenile delinquency and adult criminal behavior.

One of the first studies to explore the effect of other experiences beyond abuse and neglect was conducted in the United Kingdom by Roberts, Yang, Zhang, and Coid (2008) among 1396 incarcerated male offenders. This study showed that the most prevalent maltreatment experiences were parental discord (61.7%), harsh discipline at home (77.7%), and criminality of family members (55.3%), all affecting more than half of the sample. Childhood adverse experiences, such as a lack of parental affection, family substance misuse problems, parental discord, and criminality of family members, were associated with conduct disorders. In addition, all types of personality disorders showed correlations with early adverse experiences, and even more concerning was that the strongest correlation was found with antisocial personality disorder. In addition, a set of studies suggested the cross-gender, age, and cultural nature of this phenomenon. For example, in Germany, Driessen, Schroeder, Widmann, von Schonfeld, and Schneider (2006) found a high prevalence of childhood adverse experiences among incarcerated women and correlates with psychopathologic symptoms, while in Japan the same results were found in a sample of female juvenile offenders (Matsuura, Hashimoto, & Toichic, 2013).

Recently, a set of very important studies in this field were conducted by a team in Florida, USA. First, Wolff, Baglivio, and Piquero (2015) compared the prevalence of childhood adverse experiences between a large sample of juvenile offenders from the state of Florida ($N=64,329$) and Felitti and Anda's Kaiser-Permanente Insured cohort, a sample of college-educated adults ($N=17,337$). These authors found that juvenile offenders are 4 times more likely to score four or more different adverse experiences and 13 times less likely to score zero adverse experiences during childhood or adolescence. Baglivio and Epps (2015), using the same sample of juvenile offenders, found that the exposure to one type of

adversity is strongly related to high exposure to the other types of adverse experiences. Finally, the study of Fox, Perez, Cass, Baglivio, and Epps (2015) indicated that exposure to domestic violence, emotional abuse and neglect, household substance abuse, incarcerated household member, and physical and sexual abuse during the first 18 years of life predicted violent, serious, and chronic juvenile offending when compared to juveniles with one nonviolent felony.

In Portugal, the results are in the same vein. The study conducted by Ribeiro (2015) indicated that self-reported early adverse experiences are related with self-report delinquency among youths who were identified by CPS as victims of maltreatment. Alves and Maia (2010) found a strong relationship between early adverse experiences and psychopathologic symptoms in a sample of adult female prisoners, and Alves, Dutra, and Maia (2013) study suggested that early adverse experience, risk behaviors, and psychopathology are highly prevalent among males and females prisoners.

Despite the growing number of studies in recent years, the role of each adverse experience in juvenile justice involvement and persistence in crime, and mainly in factors promoting recidivism and psychosocial problems (e.g., illegal drug use, unemployment, mental health) among individuals with history of juvenile delinquency, remains almost unexplored. One of the few efforts in the study of psychosocial problems in youth offenders, and limited to abuse and neglect, was a study conducted by Van der Put, Lanctôt, Ruiters, and Van Vugt (2015) in a sample of 13,613 juvenile offenders. The results showed that all types of maltreatment were related to all types of psychosocial problems evaluated, including alcohol abuse, drug misuse, and mental health problems.

1.4. YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM: PREVALENCES AND CORRELATES WITH CRIME AND SOCIAL MARGINALIZATION

The most recent data from the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC, 2017) from 47 countries or autonomous regions in five continents (including 25 countries from Europe) indicate that in 2015 the rate of convictions before the age of 18 ranged from 0.98 in Argentina to 441.42 in Switzerland, per 100,000 inhabitants. Among the juvenile justice measures, the rate of juvenile offenders held in prison or any penal/correctional institution ranged from 44.3 in Trinidad and Tobago, America to 0.46 in Kyrgyzstan, Asia.

Globally in 2015 alone, according to data from 56 countries, at least 28,776 youths were held in penal/correctional institutions (UNODC, 2017). These numbers are concerning not only because juvenile delinquency is often the first step in an adult criminal career but also because we do not know the extent to which juvenile justice interventions, such as juvenile detention, are harmful or effective in different countries.

The juvenile justice measures in Portugal are served by youths aged between 12 and 20 years who have been convicted of criminal acts, committed between the ages of 12 and 15 (see Law no. 4/15; Law no. 166/99). There are eight different justice measures in Portugal, from measures served in the community to detention in juvenile justice centers, called “educational centers.” According to the Ministry of Justice (DGRSP, 2016), 181 institutionalization measures in “educational centers” and 1,149 in the community were being executed at the end of 2015, mainly educational supervision, imposition of obligations (e.g., attending psychiatric treatment), community work or economic

compensation and attendance at formative programs. These justice measures have the main purpose of preventing future recidivism and promoting social integration (Law no. 4/15; Law no. 166/99; Law no. 323-D/2000). In fact, globally the roots of any juvenile justice system are to avoid future criminal paths and a marginal lifestyle (Huizinga, Schumann, Ehret, & Elliott, 2003).

Despite the highest aims of juvenile justice interventions, the results from different studies are very concerning. The comparative study conducted by Huizinga et al. (2003) in the United States and German juvenile justice systems suggests that arrest and sanctioning does not fulfill its purpose in preventing recidivism, and paradoxically, in some circumstances appears to increase the risk of future criminality. In the same vein, different studies showed that juvenile justice involvement is associated with worse mental health, educational, occupational, and criminal outcomes (Gatti, Tremblay, & Vitaro, 2009; Shufelt & Coccozza, 2006; Sweeten, 2006; Tanner, Davies, & O'Grady, 1999), while the juvenile justice system more easily targets minors with specific psychological and social (e.g., low income) fragilities (Gatti et al., 2009).

These authors also highlight the fact that the impact of iatrogenic effects depends on the type of intervention. Placement in juvenile justice institutions appears to predict the worst iatrogenic effects on adult crime, after controlling for previous delinquency (Gatti et al., 2009). In this regard, Lambie and Randell (2013) summarized the current knowledge about the iatrogenic effects of juvenile detention, and these authors concluded that incarcerated youths are at greater risk of victimization, mental health problems, higher suicidal risk, and future criminal recidivism. This risk is increased in facilities with adult inmates. Exposure to criminal peers inside juvenile facilities, known as “deviant peer group contagion effects”

(Dodge, Dishion, & Lansford, 2006), as well as the exclusionary process for conventional opportunities caused by involvement in the justice system, called “labeling effects” (Bernburg & Krohn, 2003), have been pointed out as two of the most important explanations for the negative effects caused by the juvenile justice system.

Despite the negative effects caused by conventional interventions, such as incarceration or punitive sanctions, meta-analysis recently showed that treatments addressing criminogenic, family, and psychosocial needs are, in fact, effective, reducing juvenile recidivism and saving millions in costs to victims, governments, and even offenders. For example, Lipsey (2009) found that a “therapeutic” intervention philosophy (e.g., counseling, skill building) with high-risk offenders is, in fact, effective in reducing future recidivism in juvenile offenders, while discipline and a deterrence intervention philosophy increases the recidivism rates. Similarly, the meta-analysis of experimental studies on diversion programs by Schwalbe, Gearing, MacKenzie, Brewer, and Ibrahim (2012) suggests that family and restorative treatments are effective in reducing crime in juvenile offenders.

In Portugal, studies addressing the effects of juvenile justice involvement and the differential impact of each juvenile justice measure are very rare, and despite the scientific evidence provided by international meta-analytic studies regarding recidivism, globally very few studies have focused on the effect of juvenile justice measures on social (e.g., employment, school achievement), criminogenic (e.g., cognitive distortions), and psychological (mental health problems) outcomes. Nonetheless, juvenile justice measures providing better psychosocial outcomes are crucial to effectively address and stop the mechanisms promoting adult crime.

1.5. JUVENILE DELINQUENCY: WHAT PROMOTES DESISTANCE VERSUS PERSISTENCE IN CRIMINAL PATHWAYS DURING ADULTHOOD?

There is a scientific consensus that childhood and adolescent factors play a major role in subsequent criminal behavior (Farrington, in press; Moffitt, 2006). Nonetheless, when serious and recidivist juvenile delinquents reach adulthood, it is of tremendous importance to understand the factors promoting the desistance from crime. Over the last 20 years, a set of researches have been conducted to evaluate the factors promoting desistance from crime during adulthood in youths with a serious history of offending. A set of adult life events appears to reduce the odds of recidivism during adulthood and gradually promotes desistance from crime, with the most relevant events being: aging, marriage (versus separation), employment (versus unemployment), and moving home (Farrington, in press; Laub & Sampson, 2001).

Aging is probably the most important and uncontrollable factor promoting desistance from crime. Sampson and Laub (2003) conducted one of the most relevant studies exploring the impact of aging on desistance from crime using a follow-up of the 500 delinquent males from the Glueck's database. This study showed that the offending peak happens during adolescence, declines during middle adulthood, and potentially disappears during the sixties, and the authors conclude: "Aging out of crime is thus the norm — even the most serious delinquents desist" (Sampson & Laub, 2003, p. 315). Since then, other large longitudinal studies have found the same pattern (see Blonigen's, 2010 review). Neurobiological maturation processes and the effect of adult life responsibilities (such as work or marriage) have been advanced as explanations for the decrease of crime through life (Blonigen, 2010; Caspi & Roberts, 2010).

A good marriage is another life event upon which a broad consensus has built up about the effect on the reduction of offending. Sampson and Laub (1993) conducted one of the first studies in this field using the classic longitudinal data from Glueck and Glueck's. This study indicates that individuals entering a stable marriage are more likely to desist from crime. Some years later, Laub, Nagin, and Sampson (1998) established a causal relationship between a good-quality marriage and a gradual and cumulative desistance from crime over time. Those conclusions were replicated in some of the most important longitudinal studies, such as the *Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development* (e.g., Theobald & Farrington, 2013), the National Youth Survey (King, Massoglia, & MacMillan, 2007), and the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (Bersani, Laub, & Nieuwebeerta, 2009). Moreover, Bersani et al. (2009) showed that the effect of good marriages is a cross-gender and cross-sociohistorical context phenomenon, while Savolainen (2009) found that this effect extended to cohabitating unmarried couples. Finally, in the same vein, while a good and/or a stable marriage or cohabitating relationship promotes the reduction of offending, Theobald and Farrington (2013) found that separation has the opposite effect, increasing the effect of offending. The same dichotomous effect was found for employment: While scientific evidence showed that a stable job is followed by a reduction of offending, becoming unemployed is followed by an increase of recidivism (Farrington, Gallagher, Morley, St. Ledger, & West, 1986; Laub et al., 1998; Ramakers, Van Wilsem Nieuwebeerta, & Dirkzwager, 2016). Finally, moving from a home or city also appears to be a promotor of desistance from crime, though this has been less widely studied. One proposed explanation suggests that moving to a new social environment enables weak or cut ties with the previous delinquent peers, which

reduces the likelihood of recidivism (Kirk, 2012). Informal social control is considered crucial in explaining the effect of these life events on desistance from crime (Farrington, in press; Sampson & Laub, 2003). According to informal social control theory (Farrington, in press; Laub et al., 1998), the establishment of new bonds and ties, legally and socially accepted, such as work or marriage, works as “turning points,” gradually reducing offending and promoting a conventional lifestyle.

Despite the tremendous impact of these factors on desistance from crime (e.g., Sampson, Laub, & Wimer, 2006), due to the nature of life events, it is extremely difficult (e.g., promoting stable jobs or moving home) or impossible (e.g., promoting faster aging or good marriages) to transform this scientific knowledge into implications for policies or psychosocial interventions. Despite the impossibility of intervening in natural life events, some adult psychosocial problems associated with criminal behavior can be mitigated. In the last 20 years several studies have shown that criminal behavior is related to a set of adult psychological and social problems, such as drug misuse (Bennett et al., 2008), low education (Lochner & Moretti, 2004), mental health problems (Gendreau, Little, & Goggin, 1996; Yu, Geddes, & Fazel, 2012), and inequality (Nivette, 2011), and some of these problems only emerge during early adulthood (see Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006). Unfortunately, the effect of adult psychosocial strengths and vulnerabilities in promoting desistance from crime in individuals with a serious history of juvenile delinquency remains underexplored.