



The relationship between a parental conviction and a son's family formation



Sytske Besemer^{a,*}, David P. Farrington^b, Delphine Theobald^c

^a University of California, Berkeley, Institute of Human Development, 3210 Tolman Hall, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA

^b University of Cambridge, Institute of Criminology, Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge CB3 9DA, United Kingdom

^c Department of Psychology, Kingston University, London, Penrhyn Road Campus, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT1 2EE, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22 April 2014

Received in revised form 25 November 2015

Accepted 18 December 2015

Available online 30 December 2015

Keywords:

Family formation

Parental convictions

Intergenerational transmission

Crime

ABSTRACT

This study investigated whether a parental conviction is related to a son's family formation. Using data from the *Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development* we found that parental crime was not related to whether sons marry, the age at which they marry, or the number of children they have. However, sons of convicted parents were younger when their first child was born, they separated more often than sons of unconvicted parents, and they also more often had a shotgun marriage. A son's own offending, impulsive behaviour, low socio-economic status (SES), and his parents' age at birth of the first child were all significant predictors decreasing the predictive power of parental crime for a son's family formation. Parental separation was not a significant predictor of a son's separation and parental violence did not increase the risk of a shotgun marriage. These results support the idea of intergenerational transmission of *risky behaviour* or an impulsive lifestyle. We also find some support for the intergenerational transmission of family formation characteristics. Third, adding low SES to the analysis reduced the strength of the relationship between parental crime and a son's family formation. We find less support for an *escape from home* mechanism; or the idea that offspring use a pregnancy or shotgun marriage to escape from an unsatisfactory home situation. We conclude that crime and some family formation variables are related, but that other variables are often stronger predictors of a son's family formation and therefore it is vital to investigate such relationships in multivariate analyses.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Adages such as 'the apple doesn't fall far from the tree' seem to suggest that parents and offspring resemble each other. We know, for example, that the offspring of convicted parents have an increased risk of committing crimes themselves (Besemer, 2012; Farrington, 2011; Thornberry, 2009; van de Weijer, 2014). However, not every child of a convicted parent exhibits criminal behaviour. Unconvicted children are either not caught, not affected by their parent's unlawful behaviour or perhaps they are affected in a different way. Their parent's behaviour might impact on another sphere of their lives. For instance, Huschek and Bijleveld (2015) found that girls with a convicted father were more likely to have a "non-normative" marriage pattern. This involved a turbulent marriage pattern including several divorces, children born out of wedlock or late childless marriages. A standard pattern, in contrast,

consisted of a marriage followed by the birth of one or more children and a low prevalence of divorce (Huschek & Bijleveld, 2015). They investigated these family life trajectories in the NSCR Transfive sample for the 1950s and 1960s, a period of very standardized family life patterns (Huschek & Bijleveld, 2015). Instead of committing more crime, daughters of convicted parents might show different reactions to parental crime such as this non-standard marriage life.

Research into the relationship between parental offending and offspring family formation¹ is relatively new and scarce. Most research on intergenerational transmission has focused on just one aspect of behaviour – for example crime or family formation – thereby neglecting other behaviours that might be related to those singular behaviours. However, when investigating intergenerational continuity it is essential to consider the total picture of behaviour, since underlying problems can manifest themselves in

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: besemer@berkeley.edu (S. Besemer), Dpf1@cam.ac.uk (D.P. Farrington), D.Theobald@kingston.ac.uk (D. Theobald).

¹ Family formation includes everything related to the formation of a family and refers to events such as marriage, cohabitation, divorce or separation, having children, etc.

different ways (Loeber, Hipwell, Battista, Sembower, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 2009). For instance, boys exhibit more externalising problem behaviour such as delinquency whereas girls suffer more from internalising problems such as depression (Capaldi, DeGarmo, Patterson, & Forgatch, 2002; Robins, 1986). This article investigates how parental criminal behaviour relates to a son's family formation. Specifically, we investigate whether a parental conviction is related to whether sons marry, at what age they marry, whether they get separated², whether they experience a shotgun marriage³, at what age they have their first child, and the number of children they have. These six variables are important aspects of family formation and we expect that they might be related to parental criminal behaviour. This paper is the first to investigate these relationships and provides an overview of the empirical associations. We want to emphasize that we can only assess associations and cannot necessarily conclude anything about causation.

1.1. Mechanisms

Why would we expect a relationship between a parental conviction and offspring family formation? Below we discuss five mechanisms or explanations through which parental crime and offspring family formation might be related. It is likely that these mechanisms are empirically intertwined and that a combination of mechanisms comes into play in the relationship between parental crime and offspring family formation.

1.1.1. Escape from home

One explanation given by Huschek and Bijleveld (2015), for the more turbulent life style of daughters of delinquent parents, is that women might have an early marriage or pregnancy as a means of escape out of a disturbed or a violent parental home. Nowadays getting married or becoming pregnant is less necessary for daughters to become independent and live on their own; the independence of women has increased considerably in the past decades. For people growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, however, the situation was different (Finch, 2003; Kuijsten, 1996). The *escape from home mechanism* would predict a correlation between parental conviction and children's early marriages, shotgun marriages, early age at parenthood and perhaps even separation, because marriages might be less stable when caused by pregnancy. One would expect this mechanism to be strong especially for daughters, because, compared with sons, they did not have other means of becoming independent. Sons could more easily get a job and their own place to live. Nonetheless, even sons may have preferred to live in a couple with a woman rather than live on their own.

1.1.2. Risky behaviour transmission

The second mechanism focuses on the intergenerational transmission of risky behaviour (West & Farrington, 1977). People who commit offences often encounter problems in other areas of their lives such as unemployment, substance (ab)use, unstable living accommodation, and relationships. Crime 'seems to be only one element of a larger syndrome of anti-social behaviour which arises in childhood and usually persists into adulthood' (Farrington, 1997, p. 363). Not only criminal behaviour, but also

other related behaviours or circumstances, might be transmitted from parents to children. Successive generations may 'have disrupted family lives' or 'may experience single and teenage parenting' (Farrington, 2011, p. 132). Perhaps there is transmission of 'risky' and/or impulsive behaviour that can manifest itself in different ways: not only criminal behaviour but also unsafe sex may lead to early pregnancy, as well as unstable romantic relationships.

1.1.3. Resemblance in family characteristics

The third mechanism is more focused on the transmission of family formation rather than on the criminal life style or an unsatisfactory parental home situation. It suggests that the family formation itself is transmitted from parents to children. We know that children from larger families are more likely to have a large number of children themselves, that offspring whose parents have separated are more likely to separate themselves, and, similarly, children resemble their parents in the age at which they have offspring (Anderton, Tsuya, Bean, & Mineau, 1987; Barber, 2000, 2001; Furstenberg, Levine, & Brooks-Gunn, 1990; Horwitz, Klerman, Kuo, & Jekel, 1991; Kahn & Anderson, 1992; Kiernan, 1997; Kiernan & Cherlin, 1999; Murphy & Knudsen, 2002; Murphy & Wang, 2001; Rijken & Liefbroer, 2009; Steenhof & Liefbroer, 2008). Furthermore, coming from a large family and having teenage parents are risk factors for criminal behaviour (Farrington et al., 2006). Criminal behaviour and family formation characteristics are clearly correlated with each other, but this does not necessarily mean that parental criminal behaviour causes offspring family formation characteristics. The relationship could be spurious. For example, when offspring of convicted parents have a large number of children, this might be more strongly related to the fact that their parents also had a large number of children rather than to the fact that their parents were criminal.

Fig. 1 visually represents these first three mechanisms. Pathway A represents the escape from home mechanism where parental offending creates an unsatisfactory home situation and thereby impacts on an offspring's family formation. Pathway B represents the risky behaviour transmission and pathway C shows the intergenerational transmission of family formation.

1.1.4. Socio-economic status

Another reason why children of convicted parents might get separated more often could be because of the relationship between socio-economic status (SES) and both family formation and criminal behaviour. In England, lower SES is related to criminal convictions as well as to a higher divorce rate, young parenthood, early marriage and non-marital child-bearing (Berrington & Diamond, 2000; Besemer, 2012; Elliott, 1991; Elliott & Vaitilingam, 2008; Haskey, 1984; Hobcraft & Kiernan,

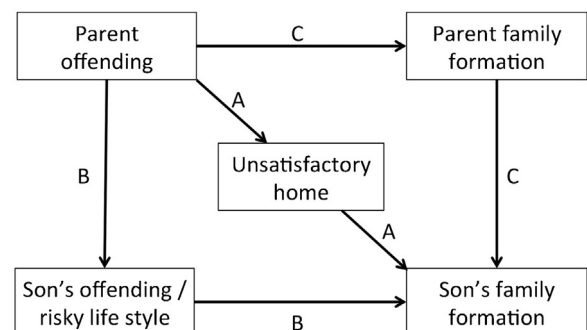


Fig. 1. Visual representation of theoretical model.

² Although the term 'divorce' might be more common, we use the word 'separation' throughout this paper, because both divorce and separation were measured. Technically, separation also includes divorce. The method section describes the operationalisation of this variable.

³ Shotgun marriages are marriages where the spouse was already pregnant, defined as cases where the child was born within seven months after the marriage.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/313203>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/313203>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)