



## Analyzing the offending activity of inmates: Trajectories of offense seriousness, escalation, and de-escalation



Abdullah Cihan<sup>a</sup>, Jonathan Sorensen<sup>b,\*</sup>, Kimberly A. Chism<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Criminal Justice, East Carolina University, 236 Rivers Building, Greenville, NC 27858, USA

<sup>b</sup> Department of Criminal Justice, East Carolina University, 238 Rivers Building, Greenville, NC 27858, USA

<sup>c</sup> School of Criminal Justice, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive Box #5127, Hattiesburg, MS 39406, USA

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Criminal career paradigm  
De-escalation  
Escalation  
Group-based trajectory modeling  
Inmate misconduct  
Multinomial logistic regression

### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The current study seeks to systematically identify developmental patterns in the seriousness (escalation and de-escalation) of inmate misconduct and the factors that distinguish those patterns.

**Methods:** Official data from a northwestern state prison system and criminal history files dating between December 1996 and December 2008 yielded an excess of 30,000 inmates. Inmates who served a minimum of three years of continuous custody were included, resulting in a final sample of 8351 inmates.

**Results:** A group-based trajectory analysis identified three distinct groups of inmates based on their developmental trajectories of offense seriousness: escalators, de-escalators, and statics. A multinomial logistic regression revealed that the rate of prior arrests was the most consistent predictor for each group. Only membership in the static group of misconduct violators was significantly associated with a broad range of predictors, such as age, gender, and custody level. This suggests that variables found to be consistently related prison misconduct in the literature may not be as successful at predicting other developmental patterns of inmate misconduct.

**Conclusions:** The trajectory analysis indicates that the inmate population is not homogenous and subgroups of inmates with unique trajectories of misconduct seriousness exist in the inmate population.

### 1. Introduction

The criminal career paradigm is rooted in research completed in the early twentieth century (Akers, Sellers, & Jennings, 2017; Piquero, Farrington, & Blumstein, 2003). Criticized as lacking theoretical grounding, the approach fell into disfavor among mainstream criminologists in the middle of the twentieth century. In the past few decades, the criminal career paradigm was brought to the forefront of criminological research largely as a derivative of the age-crime debate (Blumstein, Cohen, Roth, & Visher, 1986) and buttressed by developmental/life course criminology (Farrington, 2005; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Moffitt, 1993). According to this framework, criminal activity involves a dynamic process where individual or social characteristics may influence the initiation, continuation, escalation, desistance, and other developmental aspects of criminal activity over the life course (Farrington, 2003). Recent developments in longitudinal research have facilitated important shifts not only in distinguishing variation in the correlates of criminal career dimensions, but more importantly in understanding career patterns in distinct developmental trajectories over the life course (DeLisi & Piquero, 2011; Piquero,

Gonzalez, & Jennings, 2014). Despite the importance of developmental patterns related to offense seriousness, particularly escalation (committing more severe offenses over time) and de-escalation (moving from more serious to less serious offenses over time), such patterns have been examined less extensively than other dimensions of criminal careers, including prevalence, frequency (Lambda), age of onset, desistance, and duration of offending (Kazemian, Farrington, & Le Blanc, 2009; Le Blanc, 2002).

Criminal career research has generally neglected inmate offending trajectories and patterns of criminal careers in the prison setting (DeLisi, 2003; DeLisi, Trulson, Marquart, Drury, & Kosloski, 2011; Eggleston, Laub, & Sampson, 2004). Even less effort has been directed at elucidating inmate misconduct seriousness (escalation or de-escalation of the severity of inmate misconduct) over time and the factors that distinguish such patterns. It is important to extend this aspect of the criminal career paradigm to the prison setting since pre-prison experiences may play important roles in developmental patterns of inmate behavior. As of yet undiscovered, hidden or unobserved heterogeneity in inmate misconduct with respect to misconduct seriousness may exist. During the course of their carceral careers some inmates could commit

\* Corresponding author at: Department of Criminal Justice, 238 Rivers Building, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC 27858, USA.  
E-mail addresses: [cihana@ecu.edu](mailto:cihana@ecu.edu) (A. Cihan), [sorensenj@ecu.edu](mailto:sorensenj@ecu.edu) (J. Sorensen), [kimberly.chism@usm.edu](mailto:kimberly.chism@usm.edu) (K.A. Chism).

more serious forms of inmate misconduct over time, while others could remain stable in their level of offending or engage in less serious misconduct over time. The empirical study of change and/or stability in the severity of inmate behavior is important for theoretical understanding pertaining to inmate adjustment in the prison setting. Such investigation may also have tangible applications for practitioners and policymakers in developing and implementing policies, programs, and interventions to improve inmate adaptation to the prison setting and promote efficiency in resource allocation. The current study addresses this gap in the literature by systematically identifying developmental patterns in the seriousness (escalation and de-escalation) of inmate misconduct and the factors that distinguish those patterns.

## 1.1. Literature Review

### 1.1.1. Criminal career research and trajectories of inmate behavior

A plethora of criminological research focusing on stability and change in criminal activity at different developmental stages over the life course has generated widely accepted knowledge relating to the longitudinal pattern of offending. For example, criminal behavior begins in early adolescence and reaches a peak in the late teens; various etiological factors that may lead to criminality emerge at different points across the life course (Blumstein et al., 1986; Farrington, 2003).<sup>1</sup> Although considerable effort has been devoted to research on criminal careers, knowledge about patterns relating to the seriousness of offenses, in terms of escalation and de-escalation, remains limited.

A handful of studies specifically examined offense seriousness and reported findings associated with the escalation and de-escalation of offending (Armstrong & Britt, 2004; Berg & DeLisi, 2005; Blokland & van Os, 2010; Cale, Lussier, & Proulx, 2009; Kazemian et al., 2009; Le Blanc, 2002; Liu, Francis, & Soothill, 2011; Ozkan, 2016; Piquero, 2000; Piquero, Brame, Fagan, & Moffitt, 2006; Piquero & Chung, 2001; Ramchand, MacDonald, Haviland, & Morral, 2009). With regard to offense progression or escalation, the evidence suggests that incremental increases from less to more serious forms of offending have been detected at many stages of the life course, but the findings are mainly applicable to specific offense types (Loeber & Hay, 1997). The evidence for de-escalation, however, is severely limited as credible estimates of de-escalation are arguably more difficult to obtain than estimates of escalation; decreasing patterns of offense seriousness are more often linked to termination of offending than to de-escalation (Le Blanc, 2014). Although the two aspects of criminal careers, escalation and de-escalation, are important to understanding the developmental patterns of offense seriousness, the relevant research in this area is currently underdeveloped. This is exemplified by the failure to incorporate methodological advances in broader criminal career research into studies examining the escalation and de-escalation of crime.

The modern study of developmental criminology has largely centered on advanced analytic approaches that model developmental patterns of criminal behavior over the life course. The supposition of developmental criminology is that the offending population is heterogeneous and consists of multiple distinct groups (Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998; Moffitt, 1993). To empirically identify these groups based on their longitudinal patterns of criminality, scholars have attempted to classify offenders into the most theoretically relevant groups with respect to their offending trajectories over time (see e.g., Barker et al., 2007; Bushway, Thornberry, & Krohn, 2003; Higgins & Jennings, 2010). This area of research, which has been a core component of developmental criminology, has documented evidence of unique groups of offenders, each of whom has a distinct

developmental offending pattern over time. Given the importance of understanding the bases of criminal careers, it is somewhat surprising that more attention has not been devoted to an examination of patterns of escalation and de-escalation in misconduct among imprisoned criminals.

The notion that misconduct in the prison setting is related to criminal careers has existed in the prison literature for some time. Early sociological studies of the prison found that prisoners' roles in the inmate social system, and related patterns of behavior, varied on the basis of individual, relational, and institutional factors (Clemmer 1940; Sykes, 1958). Irwin and Cressey (1962), for instance, identified three distinct groups or subcultures of inmates (thieves, convicts, and legitimate inmates) each of which exhibited different criminal histories, characteristics (i.e., attitudes and values), and behaviors within the prison system. In an early longitudinal examination of institutional misconduct, Wheeler (1961) found that prisoners commonly adhered to an inverted U-shaped pattern; the commission of infractions by inmates was generally lowest in the beginning and end of their prison careers when inmates were oriented more toward conventional values of the outside society, and highest during the middle of their terms when inmates identified with the subcultural ethos of the prison counter culture. Flanagan (1980) first noted differences in the trajectory of inmate rule violations based on the amount of time to be served; short-term inmates adhered to Wheeler's inverted U-shaped pattern, while long-term inmates' pattern of rule violations tended to remain stable throughout the course of their incarceration.

More recent studies have generated important insight into criminal careers of inmates by classifying them into groups based on their frequency of misconduct patterns. For example, Sorensen, Wrinkle, and Gutierrez (1998) identified low, medium, and high misconduct groups of inmates. Similarly, DeLisi (2003) reported on five different groups of inmates (innocents, once-only offenders, minor recidivists, chronic, and extreme chronic). While these studies at least provide support for the heterogeneous nature of the inmate population, the dearth of evidence on the trajectories of escalation and de-escalation is a major gap in our knowledge of criminal careers in prison.

In addition to these early classifications of inmate behavior and criminal careers, researchers are using advanced quantitative methods to describe the heterogeneous nature of the inmate population. Most recently, Cochran (2012) explored the relationship between prison visitation and developmental patterns of inmate misconduct. Results of a dual trajectory analysis revealed that inmates could be classified into groups based on inmate visitation and misconduct patterns: "high misconduct," "low misconduct," and "no misconduct." Morris, Carriaga, Diamond, Piquero, and Piquero (2012) assessed heterogeneity in violent inmate misconduct throughout their period of incarceration. The researchers reported that inmates committing violent misconduct did not represent a homogenous group, and developmental patterns of inmates could be classified into three groups based on their trajectories of misconduct (early onset-limited, delayed onset, and chronic). Morris et al. (2012) further explored the relationship between certain inmate characteristics and class membership, identifying inmate demographics (age and education), criminal history, and strain as predictors of violent misconduct trajectories. Cochran and Mears (2017) utilized group-based modeling to identify five different inmate misconduct trajectories (i.e., non-misconduct, de-escalating, low, medium, and high), which successfully predicted recidivism and desistance. Using latent trajectory modeling, similar developmental trends of inmate reoffending were observed by Cihan, Davidson, and Sorensen (in press) in their study of the heterogeneous nature of inmate behavior. They found five distinct latent classes of inmate misconduct: "stable limited," "high early onset," "low early onset," "chronic," and "delayed onset." In addition to classifying these unique groups, Cihan et al., (in press) further sought to determine whether group membership was linked to a variety of inmate demographic characteristics and criminal history. Their findings showed that age at commitment and criminal history were associated

<sup>1</sup> A comprehensive review of the criminal career literature is beyond the scope of the current study.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5034319>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5034319>

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