



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Criminal Justice

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jcrimjus

On the development of self-control and deviance from preschool to middle adolescence[☆]

Alexander T. Vazsonyi*, Gabriela Ksinan Jiskrova

Department of Family Sciences, University of Kentucky, 316 Funkhouser Building, Lexington, KY 40506, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

General theory of crime
Developmental trajectory
Latent growth modeling
Latent cross-lagged modeling
Delinquency
Self-regulation

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The study tested whether developmental changes in self-control stabilize by late childhood (age 10) or continue into early and middle adolescence. Second, it tested the bidirectional, longitudinal relationship between self-control and deviance over an 11-year period.

Methods: Children ($N = 1159$) from the longitudinal NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (SECCYD) were assessed six times, ages 4.5 to 15 years. Latent growth models tested self-control and deviance trajectories, using competing growth functions to capture change over time. The longitudinal, bidirectional self-control-deviance links were examined in a cross-lagged latent model.

Results: Findings showed that children's self-control significantly increased during childhood, but stabilized sometime between 8.5 and 10.5 years. Deviance also changed in parallel, but in the opposite direction; some evidence was found of continued change in deviance during early adolescence. Finally, self-control and deviance were bidirectionally and longitudinally linked across all assessments through childhood only.

Conclusions: Findings support theoretical predictions that self-control principally develops during childhood (by age 10) and subsequently remains stable. They also support longitudinal, bidirectional self-control-deviance links, largely identical in size prior to the age of 10; study findings are contextualized vis-à-vis self-control theory as well as recent behavior genetic evidence.

Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) *Self-control theory* or *General theory of crime* has been one of the most researched and influential theories of deviance, delinquency, and crime (Cohen & Farrington, 1999; de Kemp et al., 2009; Finkenauer, Engels, & Baumeister, 2005; Pratt & Cullen, 2000; Rebellon, Straus, & Medeiros, 2008; Vazsonyi & Huang, 2010; Vazsonyi, Mikuska, & Kelley, 2017; Wright, Bryant, & Miller, 2001), not only in the field of criminology, but also in social-behavioral and developmental sciences more generally. The central tenet of the theory is that *low self-control* characterized by tendency towards impulsivity, shortsightedness, and risk-taking behaviors, plays a crucial role in the ability to refrain from deviant and criminal behaviors when an opportunity to engage in such behaviors arises. Moffitt, Poulton, and Caspi (2013, p. 359) recently concluded that "improving individual self-control will prove essential for humanity's long-term health, wealth, safety, and happiness." A key theoretical tenet is that self-control develops during the first decade of life, primarily as a result of socialization pressures; following this period, few changes should be observed

in self-control, which is expected to be largely stable, not necessarily in absolute terms, something frequently misunderstood, but in rank ordering across individuals.

The current study examined the developmental trajectories of self-control and deviance over a period of 11 years as well as the relationship between self-control and deviance during this period. The study builds on previous work by Vazsonyi and Huang (2010) who examined developmental trajectories of self-control and deviance from kindergarten to age 10, by extending the age range to middle adolescence, or age 15. Specifically, the study tested whether (a) both self-control and deviance trajectories continued their previous developmental course, and (b) the extent to which developmental changes in self-control influenced the development of deviance over time. Extending the time-frame by five additional years allowed for a more rigorous test of whether self-control changes stabilize by ages 8 to 10 or not. A number of studies have found evidence to the contrary, namely that it continued to change past childhood (e.g., Na & Paternoster, 2012;

[☆] Acknowledgment: This study was conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Early Child Care Research Network supported by NICHD through a cooperative agreement that calls for scientific collaboration between the grantees and the NICHD staff. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development or the National Institutes of Health. We would also like to sincerely thank James Peugh, Ph.D. for insightful comments focused on missing data handling as well as the use of piecewise modeling.

* Corresponding author at: University of Kentucky, Department of Family Sciences, 316 Funkhouser Building, Lexington, KY 40506, United States.
E-mail address: vazsonyi@uky.edu (A.T. Vazsonyi).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2017.08.005>

Received 28 May 2017; Received in revised form 4 August 2017; Accepted 9 August 2017

0047-2352/ © 2017 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Turner & Piquero, 2002; Winfree, Taylor, He, & Esbensen, 2006).

1. Self-control and deviance

Previous scholarship has consistently shown that low self-control is key in understanding deviance and that it is its stable predictor across the lifespan (Eisenberg et al., 2005; Moffitt, 2005; Pratt & Cullen, 2000; Vazsonyi et al., 2017). The importance of self-control and related constructs such as self-regulation and impulse control in predicting adjustment has also been recognized in a number of social and behavioral science disciplines, including psychology (Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994; Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004), education (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005), health (Griffin, Scheier, Acevedo, Grenard, & Botvin, 2011; Miller, Barnes, & Beaver, 2011), and developmental sciences (Eisenberg et al., 2005; Moffitt et al., 2011, 2013; Zhou et al., 2007).

Departing from traditional explanations of crime and deviance, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) do not define crime and deviance in strictly legal terms, but focus on the criminal acts themselves (Goode, 2008). They argue that all criminal acts share characteristics such as being immediately gratifying, simple, exciting, and distressing to victims. These features of criminal acts are, according to Gottfredson and Hirschi, “analogous” to the characteristics of individuals likely to commit them (Evans, Cullen, Burton, Dunaway, & Benson, 1997). Thus, individuals with a high propensity to commit crimes are impulsive, have difficulties delaying gratification, prefer short-term goals as opposed to the long-term ones, and are insensitive to the discomfort of others. This propensity has been termed *low self-control*, which not only increases the likelihood of criminal acts, but also a variety of other health and safety-compromising behaviors, including excessive drinking, substance use, and gambling – all manifestations of low self-control. Although criminal or health-compromising behaviors and the propensity to commit them (i.e. low self-control) are operationalized as similar concepts, they are not identical. Low self-control serves as a dispositional prerequisite for engaging in norm-violating or criminal behavior, but such behavior may not occur if the individual is not presented with an opportunity to do so (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Hirschi & Gottfredson, 2008).

2. The developmental course of self-control

One of the most important tenets of Gottfredson and Hirschi's theory is that self-control develops mainly during the first decade of life. Once the self-control stabilizes by ages 8 to 10, its relative level (or rank ordering) is expected to remain unchanged. This prediction was supported by several studies. Higgins, Jennings, Tewksbury, and Gibson (2009) found that although individuals differed in their mean levels of self-control, this level remained largely stable between ages 12 and 16. Similarly, based on Hay and Forrest's (2006) investigation, the majority of children between the ages of 7 and 15, showed considerable stability in self-control both in absolute and relative (rank-order) terms. In addition, Coyne and Wright (2014) found that rank-ordering of individuals with regard to their level of self-control remained stable in a sample of children between kindergarten and fifth grade.

On the other hand, some other studies have also found evidence that self-control continues to change during the second decade of life. Winfree et al. (2006) found declines in self-control between ages 12 to 17; similarly, Na and Paternoster (2012) found changes in self-control that might occur at least for some individuals even during adolescence as a result of social bonding and social control. Lastly, Burt, Sweeten, and Simons (2014) found neither absolute nor relative stability of self-control in a study spanning from childhood to the mid-20s. They also separately tested two facets of self-control, impulsivity and sensation seeking, and found that each dimension followed different developmental trajectories over time. A number of similar studies using data-driven, group-based trajectory modeling strategies found different

degrees of stability or change in self-control, depending on the self-control group membership, suggesting that levels of self-control might in fact change for some, but remain stable for others (Burt, Simons, & Simons, 2006; Meldrum, Young, & Weerman, 2012; Ray, Jones, Loughran, & Jennings, 2013).

3. The current study

Previous studies have examined the developmental course of self-control and its stability over time (e.g., Arneklev, Cochran, & Gainey, 1998; Beaver, Wright, DeLisi, & Vaughn, 2008; Burt et al., 2006, 2014; Hay & Forrest, 2006; Perrone, Sullivan, Pratt, & Margaryan, 2004; Vazsonyi & Huang, 2010). However, they have also had several limitations, such as the use of non-representative samples (e.g., Burt et al., 2006) or a relatively short timeframe during which samples were followed (e.g., Beaver et al., 2008); in addition, very few previous efforts have focused on the critical transitional period from late childhood to adolescence, to fully test key theoretical predictions about the development of self-control. Additionally, few studies have examined whether the developmental course of self-control was associated with analogous changes in deviance over time. A number of authors (e.g. Burt et al., 2006; Meldrum et al., 2012) opted for testing data-driven, person-centered developmental trajectories to identify groups based on their developmental course of self-control. Although these studies provided important insights, they did not test mean developmental changes in self-control from childhood to adolescence, something we consider more consistent with Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) original thinking.

The current study uses the NICHD SECCYD (2001) longitudinal data set to answer questions about the developmental course, timing, and stability of self-control and deviance, as well as their developmental links over time. These are particularly suitable data for testing these questions because of the number of years over which individuals were followed (from early childhood to adolescence), the sample representativeness, as well as the consistency of key study constructs used across time points. The study represents an important extension of Vazsonyi and Huang's (2010) work by testing whether self-control and deviance trajectories change past childhood and into adolescence, until age 15. More specifically, the study sought to test for changes in the developmental cadence or pace of self-control after the ages of 8 to 10 years, and whether the developmental course of self-control predicted changes in deviance over time. Extending the timeframe of the study for an additional 5 years permitted a more thorough test of the fundamental assertion (and points of contention) by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) that self-control development stabilizes by late childhood; in addition, it addressed optimal timing of intervention efforts targeting self-control.

To test Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) premise that self-control stabilizes by age 10, developmental change was modeled in the full sample of children part of the study as opposed to examining empirically derived, group-based trajectories. The assertion that self-control develops principally during childhood followed by stability implies that a growth trajectory of self-control is steeper during childhood followed by small or no change in the construct subsequently. Additionally, as self-control has been found to be closely related to deviance (e.g. Vazsonyi et al., 2017), we expected changes in deviance over time parallel to those of self-control. Thus, consistent with theory, it was hypothesized that (a) self-control would increase during childhood only, followed by no additional changes during early adolescence, (b) levels of deviance would decrease inversely, parallel to the observed changes and increases in self-control, and (c) self-control scores would predict developmental changes in deviance over time.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7242161>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7242161>

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