



# Heavy drinking ensnares adolescents into crime in early adulthood



Jessica M. Craig <sup>a,c,\*</sup>, Robert G. Morris <sup>a</sup>, Alex R. Piquero <sup>a</sup>, David P. Farrington <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences, The University of Texas at Dallas, 800 W. Campbell Rd. Mail Station 31, Richardson, TX 75080

<sup>b</sup> Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge, CB3 9DA

<sup>c</sup> Department of Criminal Justice, The University of North Texas, Chilton Hall, Suite 265, 1155 Union Circle #305130, Denton, TX 76203

## ARTICLE INFO

Available online 11 March 2015

## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study offers a partial test of Moffitt's (1993) hypothesis that some adolescent-limited offenders may be ensnared by the consequences of their delinquency in a way that continues their offending.

**Methods:** Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development data is used along with a multi-step analytic procedure including (a) group-based trajectory modeling to identify variability in offending and (b) propensity score matching to estimate the impact of one specific snare, heavy drinking, on criminal convictions occurring in early adulthood.

**Results:** Results provide some support for Moffitt's hypothesis; adolescent-limited offenders who engaged in heavy drinking at age 18 were more likely to be convicted during early adulthood.

**Conclusions:** This analysis offered a stronger test of the snares hypothesis by first, separating the data into groups of offenders who followed similar offending patterns, and second, matching the cases on developmental and psychosocial characteristics in order to assess the snare's role on later offending. Findings call attention to the effect of problem adolescent behavior on later adult outcomes.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

The investigation of criminal careers focuses on antisocial behavior observed over the life course as well as on the factors that predict involvement in such behaviors (Blumstein, Cohen, Roth, & Visher, 1986; DeLisi & Piquero, 2011; Piquero, Farrington, & Blumstein, 2003). Developmental/Life Course Criminology offers a broad paradigm to explain life-course offending by focusing on the causes and correlates of persistence, desistance, escalation, and specialization of offending (Farrington, 2003a). Although there are several theoretical orientations within this paradigm, Moffitt's (1993) developmental taxonomy is one of the most prominent and well-investigated. Her theory proposes two distinct offending groups, adolescent-limited and life-course-persistent offenders. The taxonomy argues that factors pertaining to individuals, their family, and their environment differentiate these groups and lead to unique offending patterns that vary in shape, type, and level over the life course.

Since its inception, Moffitt's theory has been tested extensively (Jennings & Reingle, 2012; Piquero & Brezina, 2001; Stattin, Kerr, & Bergman, 2010; White, Bates, & Buyske, 2001), but many of the theory's hypotheses warrant further testing (Moffitt, 2006; Piquero & Moffitt, 2005). One hypothesis that has not received much attention is the snares hypothesis. This hypothesis is central to adolescent-limited

offenders (i.e., those persons who tend to desist from offending upon adulthood); however within this group Moffitt anticipates that some may become ensnared by the consequences of delinquency in a manner that prevents or postpones desistance. For instance, an unwanted pregnancy or a drug addiction could explicitly prevent the achievement of prosocial roles that are related to desistance and enhance the correlation with factors that are associated with continuity in offending.

To date, only a handful of studies have directly tested Moffitt's snare hypothesis (Higgins, Bush, Marcum, Ricketts, & Kirchner, 2010; Hussong, Curran, Moffitt, Caspi, & Carrig, 2004; Reyes, Foshee, Bauer, & Ennett, 2011). These studies have found support for her argument such that substance use was associated with a slower rate of desistance. However, they have relied upon limited samples and measurement strategies, such as only looking at certain segments of the population or using broad measures of substance use. This study seeks to address these limitations by assessing the impact of a problem drinking behavior, defined here by heavy drinking, on subsequent convictions using a sample of males from a working-class area of South London. Isolating problem drinking is not only consistent with Moffitt's conception of a snare, but problem drinking itself exerts a significant social and financial toll on persons, their families, and society more generally (Bouchery, Horwood, Sacks, Simon, & Brewer, 2011).

Before presenting the results of our analysis, we provide an overview of the literature on Moffitt's taxonomy and the role of substance use in relation to desistance.

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 972 883 4982.  
E-mail address: jmh101120@utdallas.edu (J.M. Craig).

## Moffitt's developmental taxonomy

In an attempt to explain the age-crime curve, Moffitt (1993) presented a developmental taxonomy that consisted of two distinct offending groups as well as a smaller sample of persons who abstain from criminal activity altogether. The purported offending groups, the adolescent-limited (AL) and the life-course-persistent (LCP) offenders, have different developmental paths that lead to their unique offending patterns. LCP's are hypothesized to be born with (or acquire shortly thereafter) neuropsychological deficits that, if untreated, lead to maladjusted behavior. Oftentimes, these children are born into families that are unable to provide or afford adequate medical care. Moffitt argues that their disadvantaged environment interacts with their neuropsychological abnormalities to lead to age-appropriate antisocial behavior over the life course. For instance, some children may have challenging temperaments that both thwart attempts at disciplinary management and limit the development of healthy peer relationships. Over time these antisocial acts lead to a feature Moffitt (1993:683) referred to as "cumulative continuity" where the consequences of their behavior cut off future prosocial options, further entrenching them in deviance. Thus, as their name implies, LCP's tend to commit illegal and otherwise antisocial acts throughout their life course and are unable to form close emotional bonds with others. As well, failure across several life domains is common and the likelihood of meaningful change out of this pathway is hampered. In 2006, Moffitt argued that LCP offenders could also resemble the low-level chronic offenders, whose identification resulted more so empirically than theoretically as a result of analyses based on group-based trajectory modeling (see Nagin, Farrington, & Moffitt, 1995). Although these individuals do not offend as frequently, their deviance is still persistent over the life course and they experience other poor outcomes as adults. Thus, the LCP group is characterized more so by stability in offending over the life course and less so by its frequency.

The second group of offenders, AL's—the one of direct interest to this work—are neither born with neuropsychological deficits or are raised in a criminogenic environment and instead experience a more prosocial childhood relative to LCP's (Moffitt, 1993). This group is expected to commit crimes as juveniles because of what Moffitt termed the *maturity gap*. In modern industrialized nations, puberty occurs earlier so there is a "gap between biological maturity and social maturity" (p.685). Although AL's feel they should have access to adult privileges, such as drinking alcohol and autonomy, society legally does not give them this access. This creates a type of pressure and tension for AL's. They observe their LCP peers engaging in delinquency and seemingly not experiencing the maturity gap so they begin mimicking their behaviors, especially participation in non-violent illegal acts. Moffitt argues that experiencing this tension is normative for adolescents and, as a result, association with like-minded peers serves to increase the likelihood of 'normative' delinquency. At first, the consequences of delinquency are reinforcing as AL's experience a newfound autonomy and separation from their parents. However, eventually AL's mature and they start acquiring adult roles legitimately so the consequences of delinquency become negative. As a result, they desist from delinquency and begin to live prosocial lives.

### Past research

Research using various longitudinal samples and statistical techniques has generally been supportive of several aspects of Moffitt's taxonomy (see also Moffitt, 2006; Piquero & Moffitt, 2005). However, group-based trajectory models have typically found three or four unique groups of offenders (Jennings & Reingle, 2012; Piquero, 2008; Stattin et al., 2010; White et al., 2001), providing some contradictory evidence to the taxonomy. For example, Stattin et al. (2010) found substantial evidence for a group of offenders who, similar to LCPs, exhibited early neuropsychological deficits and started antisocial behavior in childhood, but desisted following adolescence alongside the AL group.

Laub and Sampson (2003), in their long-term follow-up study of the Glueck delinquent sample, also identified more than the two groups of offenders hypothesized in Moffitt's taxonomy and could not differentiate the most extreme group of offenders through childhood risk measures. In a systematic review of the empirical literature on latent group-based trajectories of violent and delinquent behaviors, Jennings and Reingle (2012) found that most of the variation in the number and shape of identified offending trajectories was dependent upon the sample and its geography, the measurement strategy, the length of observation, and the developmental phase of the life course that was studied, but still concluded that, overall, the findings supported Moffitt's taxonomy.

In one review, Moffitt (2006) took stock of the empirical research that had accumulated with respect to the taxonomy, highlighting the aspects that have received the strongest support as well as the hypotheses that require more sustained attention. One of these was the role of snares for continued offending among AL's. She argued that AL's could become ensnared by the consequences of their antisocial behavior, making it more difficult for them to desist. Moffitt (1993:691) posits that, in a manner similar to LCP offenders, AL's may be cut off from prosocial opportunities because of certain outcomes related to their delinquency, specifically "[a] drug habit, an incarceration, interrupted education, or a teen pregnancy." For instance, incurring a felony drug conviction could prevent a person from acquiring a loan for college education or opportunities for gainful employment. These snares, while not unsurmountable, present AL's with extra challenges during the period in which desistance would otherwise be unfolding, sometimes prolonging the criminal career or preventing desistance altogether.

Only a small number of studies have directly assessed the role of snares on offending continuity and they have provided empirical support for this hypothesis. In the first study, Hussong et al. (2004) developed two separate hypotheses from Moffitt's work, the snares hypothesis and the launch hypothesis, both employing substance use as a snare. The former was more closely tied to Moffitt's original taxonomy as it argued that snares have only a short-term impact on desistance. The launch hypothesis, on the other hand, viewed early-adolescent substance use as an early symptom of long-term antisocial behavior as it altered the life course to delay de-escalation of offending. Using 461 males from the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study, they found support for both hypotheses. Regarding the launch hypothesis, those with more substance use (as defined by alcohol and marijuana use) at the end of adolescence exhibited more antisocial behavior throughout early adulthood but then showed the strongest decline in such behavior relative to peers. Regarding the snares hypothesis, those who abused substances in young adulthood engaged in more antisocial behavior than would be expected based on their trajectory. Thus, substance use was found to have both distal and proximal effects on desistance by age 21.

A few studies have studied the role of alcohol use specifically on future offending within the context of Moffitt's snare hypothesis. Using a sample of 283 African Americans from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth followed to age 22, Higgins et al. (2010) found that alcohol use in general led to slower desistance from crime, findings in line with the snare hypothesis. Using longitudinal data on high school students, Reyes et al. (2011) assessed whether those who used alcohol heavily were more likely to continue engaging in physical dating aggression throughout their teenage years relative to those who did not use alcohol heavily. Their results supported the snare hypothesis, but also indicated that the effect of alcohol on dating violence decreased with age, perhaps because alcohol use becomes more normative as teenagers age so that it no longer indicates a risk factor.

Although not a direct test of the snare hypothesis, Kazemian, Farrington, and Le Blanc (2009) presented evidence that an individual's substance use at ages 17 and 18 was associated with the likelihood of desistance from crime by age 32. Specifically, among the men

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/882651>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/882651>

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