

# Preventing the Transition from Juvenile Delinquency to Adult Crime



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# Topics

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- Conclusions of the U.S. National Institute of Justice Study Group on Transitions from Juvenile Delinquency to Adult Crime, chaired by Rolf Loeber and David P. Farrington.
- Effective interventions to prevent juvenile offenders continuing to offend in adulthood.
- Policy implications: should there be special policies for young adult offenders?

# **NIJ Study Group Book**



## **FROM JUVENILE DELINQUENCY TO ADULT CRIME: CRIMINAL CAREERS, JUSTICE POLICY, AND PREVENTION**

Edited by Rolf Loeber and David P. Farrington  
New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012  
(Plus 6 NIJ Bulletins)

# Examples of Key Questions (1)

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1. How common is persistence in and desistance from offending between adolescence and early adulthood, and how common is the onset of offending during early adulthood?
2. What explains persistence in and desistance from offending during the transition from adolescence to early adulthood, and what explains the onset of offending during early adulthood?
3. How well does persistence in and desistance from offending during the transition from adolescence to early adulthood map on to the minimum legal age of adulthood (i.e., age 18 in most U.S. states)?
4. Is there any sharp discontinuity in offending behaviour or in its causes at age 18?
5. To what extent can the minimum age for adult court of 18 be justified by reference to human development and its causes?

# Examples of Key Questions (2)

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## **Legal and Judicial Issues**

- Are legal boundaries related to young people's development of cognitive control (or lowered impulsivity)?
- Should there be special provisions for young adult offenders?

## **Interventions**

- How effective are family-based programs during childhood in reducing offending during the young adult years?
- How effective are interventions with older juvenile delinquents (ages 14-17) in preventing continuation into young adult offending?
- How effective are labour market interventions in reducing young adult offending?
- What is known about the relative effectiveness of the juvenile and criminal justice systems in reducing recidivism?
- What is known about the financial benefits and costs of different interventions that might reduce offending in the young adult years?

# Offending Careers

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The study group focused on the age period between mid-adolescence and early adulthood (roughly ages 15–29):

- Prevalence peaks about 15-19, then decreases.
- The peak is later for more serious crimes such as violence.
- Increasing seriousness of offences in young adult years: homicide, violence, drug dealing, gun carrying.
- Decreased specialization with age.
- Decreased co-offending with age.
- No sharp change in offending patterns on the 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

# **Possible Explanatory Factors for Persistence in Offending**

# Explanatory Processes

We considered the following explanatory processes:

1. Individual differences in self-control;
2. Behavioural risk and protective factors;
3. Environmental risk and protective factors;
4. Brain maturation;
5. Cognitive changes;
6. Mental illnesses and substance use;
7. Effects of life events such as getting married, and becoming employed, and contextual changes, including situational and neighbourhood contexts; and
8. The justice response.



# **Exposure to Risk Factors**

# Predictors of Reoffending by Juvenile Offenders (YLS/CMI)

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- Prior offending history
- Drug abuse, alcohol abuse
- Aggressive, antisocial attitude
- High impulsivity, low empathy
- Poor school performance
- Negative peer relations
- Low family income, poor housing
- Criminal family
- Parental conflict, poor child-rearing

# Conclusions about the Impact of Young People's Exposure to Risk Factors

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- The number of risk factors increases with age.
- It is likely that early individual differences play a role in the later probability of offending in adolescence and early adulthood.
- However, there is abundant evidence that risk factors in several other domains (i.e., family, peers, school, neighbourhood), emerging later in childhood and adolescence, strongly contribute to the later probability of offending.

# **Brain Maturation**

# Developmental Shift in the Control of Behaviour between Adolescence and Early Adulthood

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- External controls by adults diminish, for example:
  - Less supervision by parents; and
  - Less punishment by parents.
- Internal and emotional controls over behaviour are presumed to increase.
- “Stop and Think” systems in prefrontal cortex in most children do not mature before early adulthood.
- Programs to improve self-control can be effective.

# Brain Development during the Transition from Adolescence to Early Adulthood

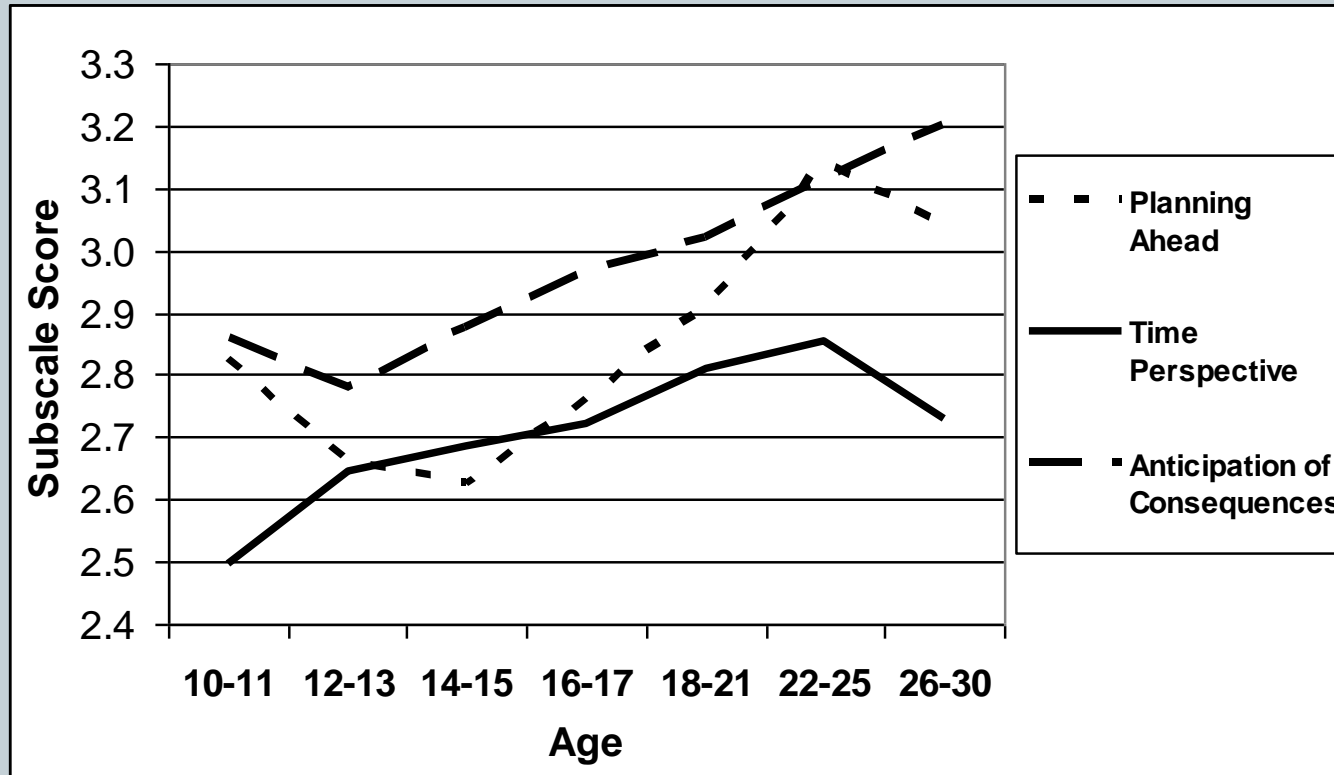
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- Neural development during early childhood is characterized by massive changes that support the development of mature regulation of emotion and behaviour.
- Neural development is characterized by an initial exuberant increase in synaptic connections followed by pruning and synaptic elimination that improve the efficiency of brain connectivity.
- Much of this brain development continues into early adulthood.

# **Behavioural Expressions of Brain Development**

# Planning Ahead, Time Perspective, and Anticipation of Future Consequences Improves between 10 and 25

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Note: Cross-sectional data.

Source: Steinberg et al., 2009, p. 36



# **Life Transitions**

# Successful Transitions to Normative Adult Roles Can Decrease Offending in Adolescence and Adulthood

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- The period between adolescence and early adulthood is a time when major transitions tend to take place:
  - Leaving school
  - Getting a job or starting studies
  - More stable intimate relationship
  - Leaving home
  - Moving to another type of neighbourhood

# Conclusions about the Impact of Life Transitions

- Research findings indicate that successful transitions to adult roles in marriage, parenthood, employment, and moving to a new neighbourhood can reduce offending in adolescence and early adulthood.
- There is evidence that improving employability of young people causes significant reductions in offending.

# **Effective Programs for Juvenile Offenders**



# Effectiveness of Broad Types of Interventions: Mark Lipsey (2009) – Meta-analysis

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Based on 361 research reports. Inclusion criteria:

- Juveniles aged 12-21 received an intervention intended to have positive effects on their subsequent delinquency.
- Quantitative results were reported for a comparison between a treatment condition and a control condition for at least one delinquency outcome measure. In addition, the assignment of juveniles to conditions was random or, if not, pre-treatment differences were reported or matched.
- The study was conducted in an English-speaking country and reported in English. More than 90% of the studies located were conducted in the United States.
- Focus on percentage of juveniles rearrested during 12 months after intervention.

# Effectiveness of Broad Types of Interventions

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1. Surveillance (- 6%)
2. Deterrence (+ 2%)
3. Discipline (+ 8%)
4. Restorative (- 10%)
5. Counselling (- 13%)
6. Skill Building (- 12%)

In parentheses: Average reductions in recidivism from 50%.

# Surveillance

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- Interventions in this category are based on the idea that closer monitoring of the juvenile will inhibit reoffending. The main program of this sort is intensive probation or parole, oriented toward increasing the level of contact and supervision. Such programs also sometimes include additional services but the surveillance component refers only to the monitoring.
- Not very effective.

# Deterrence

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- Interventions in this category attempt to deter the youth from reoffending by dramatizing the negative consequences of that behaviour. The prototypical program of this sort is prison visiting – “scared straight” type programs in which juvenile offenders are exposed to prisoners who graphically describe the horrible nature of prison conditions.
- Very ineffective and indeed harmful.
- Systematic review by Petrosino (2013).



# Discipline

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- The theme of these interventions is that juveniles must learn discipline to succeed in life and avoid reoffending and that, in order to do so, they need to experience a structured regime that imposes such discipline on them. The main programs of this sort are paramilitary regimes in boot camps.
- Not very effective.
- Systematic review by MacKenzie (2005): boot camps generally do not work but boot camps combined with other treatment (e.g., cognitive-behavioural treatment) are effective.

# Restorative Programs

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- Programs of this sort aim to repair the harm done by the juvenile's delinquent behaviour by requiring some compensation to victims or reparations via community service. They may also involve some form of direct reconciliation between victims and offenders. Two different intervention types:
  - Restitution: Offenders provide financial compensation to the victims or perform community service (- 9%).
  - Mediation: Offenders apologize to their victims in spoken or written form and may meet with them under supervision. These interventions typically also include a restitution component (- 12%).
- Quite effective.

# Counselling

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- Individual counselling (- 5%)
- Mentoring (- 21%)
- Family counselling (- 13%)
- Short term family crisis counselling (- 12%)
- Group counselling led by a therapist (- 22%)
- Peer programs in which the peer group plays much of the therapeutic role; for example, guided group interaction programs (- 4%)
- Mixed counselling – combinations of any of the above but especially individual, group, family (- 16%)
- Mixed counselling with supplementary referrals for other services, a common form for diversion programs (- 8%)
  
- Quite effective.

# Skill Building Programs

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These programs provide instruction, practice, incentives, and other such activities and inducements aimed at developing skills that will help juveniles control their behaviour and/or enhance their ability to participate in normative prosocial activities. The main forms are the following:

- Behavioural programs – behaviour management, contingency contracting, token economies (- 22%)
- Cognitive-behavioural therapy (- 26%)
- Social skills training (- 13%)
- Challenge programs – interventions that provide opportunities for experiential learning by mastering difficult or stressful tasks (- 12%)
- Academic training – for example, tutoring (- 10%)
- Job related interventions – vocational counselling and training, job placement (- 6%)
- Quite effective.

# Specific (Brand Name) Well Developed and Well Validated Programs

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- Reasoning and Rehabilitation (Robert Ross)
- Treatment Foster Care (Patti Chamberlain)
- Functional Family Therapy (James Alexander)
- Multisystemic Therapy (Scott Henggeler)
- Stop Now and Plan (Leena Augimeri)

# Robert Ross (Ontario)

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## Reasoning and Rehabilitation program:

- Key elements: self-control (teach offenders to stop and think), social skills (negotiating, how to respond to criticism, apologizing), thinking skills (how to analyze interpersonal problems), creative thinking (consider prosocial options), critical reasoning, social perspective taking (see the other's viewpoint), values enhancement (care about victims, empathy), emotional control (anger management), and helper therapy (become prosocial trainers for other offenders).
- Tong & Farrington (2008) systematic review: R&R is effective, more so in community than in institutions.

# Patti Chamberlain (Oregon)

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- Treatment Foster Care (TFC): foster parents use behaviour management methods to provide boys with a structured daily living environment, with close supervision and clear rules and limits.
- 79 chronic male delinquents randomly assigned to TFC or group homes (group work, confronting negative behaviour, individual therapy).
- Find: TFC boys have lower official and self-reported delinquency in a one year follow-up.
- MacDonald & Turner (2007) systematic review.

# James Alexander (Utah)

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- Functional Family Therapy (FFT): aim to change family contingencies to increase positive and decrease negative behaviour.
- Aim to modify family communication patterns to be clearer and more reciprocal, considering alternative solutions to problems: work with entire family.
- 86 delinquents randomly assigned to FFT or control conditions.
- Find: 26% of experimental delinquents reoffended, versus 55% of controls.



# Scott Henggeler (South Carolina)

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- Multisystemic Therapy (MST): family intervention to promote the parent's ability to monitor and discipline the adolescent, peer intervention to promote prosocial friends, school intervention to enhance competence; work with family/peer/school, youth may not be present (unlike FFT).
- 176 serious delinquents (mean age 14) randomly assigned to 6 months of MST or individual therapy.
- Sawyer & Borduin (2011): the MST group had fewer felony arrests (33% vs 55%) and fewer years incarcerated (5.3 vs 7.9) up to age 37.
- Curtis et al. (2004), Littell et al. (2005) reviews.

# Leena Augimeri (Toronto) (1)

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- Target boys aged 6-11 referred by police.
- Based on skills training, cognitive problem solving, self-control, anger management: aim to control impulsiveness.
- SNAP: Stop now and plan. Snap fingers
  - Stop: calm down, take deep breaths, count to 10.
  - Now and: use coping statements, think what to say to remain calm; “This is hard but I can do it!”
  - Plan: effective solutions to interpersonal problems.
- Teach children to identify triggers: what makes them angry or upset.

## Leena Augimeri (Toronto) (2)

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- 12 week program; group of about 7 children meet for 90 minutes with facilitator (6-7, 8-9, 10-11).
- Social skills, self-control, group discussion, modelling, behavioural rehearsal, role playing, relaxation training, home practice exercises.
- Topics include: joining in, dealing with anger, avoiding trouble, dealing with peer pressure, apologizing, stopping stealing.
- Evaluation by Koegl et al. (2008): program is effective.
- Independent evaluations by Lipman (2008)  $d = .41$ ; Burke & Loeber (2015)  $d = .40$ .

# Farrington & Koegl (2015)

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- Cost-benefit analysis of SNAP program of Augimeri.
- Program costs \$4,641 CAD per boy on average (2012 \$).
- Effect size  $d$  between .2 and .4.
- Corresponds to 18% to 33% decrease in offending.
- Saves 1.25 to 2.29 convictions per boy (age 12-20).
- Saves \$14,270 to \$26,162 per boy (discounted).
- Benefit: cost ratio 3.1 to 5.6 for convictions.
- But convictions are the tip of the iceberg.
- Scaling up to self-reports – benefit: cost ratio 26 to 47.

# Programs Targeted on Gangs

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- Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) program: 13-week school program on the dangers of gang involvement, including CBT, social skills, refusal skills, conflict resolution.
- Aggression Replacement Training (ART): 10-week program including anger control and moral reasoning.
- Cure Violence: “violence interrupters” work on the streets to prevent conflicts becoming violent, change community norms, work with high-risk individuals.

# **Key Policy Recommendations**



# Why is There Special Treatment for Juvenile Offenders?

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Compared with adults, juveniles have:

- Less mature judgment;
- Poorer decision making in offending opportunities;
- Poorer executive functioning, reasoning, abstract thinking, planning;
- More influenced by immediate desirable consequences than longer-term possible undesirable consequences;
- Poorer impulse control, more likely to take risks and commit crimes for excitement rather than according to a rational choice;

## Juvenile Offenders (Continued)

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- Less set in their offending habits, more changeable, more redeemable;
- Less culpable or blameworthy, diminished responsibility, less deserving of punishment;
- Poorer emotion regulation and self-regulation;
- Lower adjudicative competence to communicate with lawyers, make legal decisions, understand and participate in legal procedures, stand trial; and
- More susceptible to peer influences.



# Policy Recommendations (1)

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- Special courts for young adult offenders aged 18-25 could be established on an experimental basis in a small number of areas. The focus should be on rehabilitation rather than retribution. The US should learn from European experiences.
- Juveniles who are transferred to adult courts tend to receive more severe sentences and tend to have higher recidivism rates than those in juvenile courts.
- Therefore, we expect that these special courts would cause a decrease in recidivism and a decrease in incarceration, and consequently they would save money.
- In addition, they could be designed to have less stigmatizing effects than the adult criminal courts.

## Policy Recommendations (2)

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- There should be special correctional facilities for young adult offenders, including programs such as cognitive-behavioural therapy, drug treatment, restorative justice, mentoring, education and vocational training, and work release programs.
- Special facilities for young adults already exist in some states (e.g., Pennsylvania).
- Juveniles sent to adult correctional facilities have higher recidivism rates than those in juvenile facilities.
- Therefore, we expect that the special facilities will cause a decrease in recidivism and consequently will save money (even taking account of the cost of the programs).

## Policy Recommendations (3)

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- There could be a “youth discount” for young adult offenders: a decrease in the severity of penalties to take account of their juvenile-like lesser culpability and diminished responsibility.
- Because of these factors, death sentences and life without parole sentences in the U.S. should be abolished for young adult offenders.
- There should be risk/needs and maturity assessments and screening of young adult offenders to guide the selection of appropriate disposals and interventions.
- Young adult offenders with substance use problems should be diverted to drug courts, and those with mental health problems should be dealt with by mental health professionals.

## Policy Recommendations (4)

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- There should be evidence-based programs for young adult offenders in the community and after release, including Multisystemic Therapy, cognitive-behavioural therapy, drug treatment, restorative justice, mentoring, educational and vocational training programs, and Communities That Care.
- Employment and relationship programs should be mounted to encourage desistance, and other programs should aim to reduce disorderly transitions such as not graduating from high school and single teenage parenthood.
- Other useful programs are those aiming to reduce opportunities for offending, such as hot spots policing and situational crime prevention, and programs aiming to reduce gang membership and drug dealing, targeted on high crime neighbourhoods.

# Conclusions (1)

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- The Study Group concluded that the evidence, especially from developmental neuroscience, suggests that, in many respects, young adult offenders aged 18-25 are more similar to juveniles than to adults in individual factors such as executive functions, maturity, impulse control, risk taking, and decision making focused on immediate rather than future consequences.
- However, there is a great need to develop screening instruments that measure brain maturation and executive functioning.
- One policy option is to increase the minimum age for adult court from 18 to 21 or more. Influenced by the Dutch Study Group, in 2014 the Netherlands increased the minimum age to 23 (see Frieder Dunkel).
- We believe that our recommendations offer more hope and more crime reduction and financial benefits than does the implementation of longer prison sentences for young adults in the adult criminal justice system.

## Conclusions (2)

- The Study Group urged the U.S. federal government to develop an action plan to implement its key recommendations to assist states in changing their statutes and practices so that justice is applied more fairly and with more knowledge of how youth develop into mature adults.
- These initiatives should be rigorously evaluated and cost-benefit analyses should be carried out. Age, gender, and racial/ethnic differences in the effectiveness of programs should be studied.
- In September 2015, an NIJ report on New Thinking in Community Corrections was launched in the Great Hall of Justice, proposing new ways of dealing with young adult offenders aged 18-24.
- We believe that our recommendations about young adult offenders are relevant to Canada.