

## AN ANALYSIS OF LIFE COURSE THEORIES

### Hayat Boyu Suçluluk Teorilerinin Analizi

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#### Özet

1980'li yılların sonu ve 1990'ların başında ergenlik ve suçluların yaşamları boyunca anti-sosyal davranışlar da bulunması araştırmacıların yoğun olarak ilgisini çekmeye başlamıştır. Bazı akademisyenler bu yükselen paradigmayı gelişimsel kriminoloji veya hayat-boyu kriminoloji (suçluluk) olarak isimlendirmişlerdir. Suçlar büyük oranda ergenlik döneminde işlendiğinden dolayı, Kriminologlar ergenlik ve suç işleme konusundaki ilgilerini ve ampirik analizlerin birçoğu bu dönemi irdelemiştir. Bu alanda çoğu ampirik araştırma suçların başlangıç, suça devam etme (sebat) ve suçtan vazgeçme aşamalarının belirleyici unsurlarını ve bunların nasıl gerçekleştiğini incelemiştir. Bu çalışma hayat boyu suçluluk anlayışı ve hayat boyu suçluluk teorilerini irdeleyerek bu teorilerin suça başlama, suça devam etme ve suçtan vazgeçme olgularını karşılaştırmıştır. Ayrıca, hayat boyu suçluluk modelinin kriminoloji açısından politika önerilerini incelemiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Hayat boyu suçluluk teorileri, Yetişkinlik, Gelişimsel kriminoloji, Suça başlama, Sebat.

#### Abstract

Interest in adolescence and antisocial behavior throughout offenders' lives had grown rapidly by the late 1980s and early 1990s. Some scholars called for a developmental criminology or a new term often used to describe this emerging pa-

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radigm is life-course criminology. Criminologists have concentrated most of their interest on the teenage years and delinquency, and the majority of empirical tests of criminological theories have been conducted on adolescent delinquency for decades. The reason for this tendency in criminological analysis was because this stage in the life course is known to generate high rates of illegal behavior. Much of the research in this area was empirical and longitudinal and was meant to examine both the predictors of offending (onset, persistence, and desistance) and the pathways of events that directed people into and out of crime. The emergence of the notion of criminal careers which introduces the notion that offenders have careers much like people who work in the corporate world have careers also played a role in focusing attention on the life-course feature of crime. This study analyzes and compares several life course criminal theories.

**Key Words:** Life course theories, Adolescence, Developmental criminology, Onset, Desistance.

## Introduction

Criminologists have concentrated most of their interest on the teenage years and delinquency (e.g., Gul and Gunes, 2009), and the majority of empirical tests of criminological theories have been conducted on adolescent delinquency for decades. The reason for this tendency in criminological analysis was because this stage in the life course is known to generate high rates of illegal behavior. Caspi and Moffitt (1995:493) noted that the delinquency curve reaches its highest point at approximately 17 years of age: “The majority of criminal offenders are teenagers; by the early 20s, the number of active offenders decreases by over 50%; by age 28, almost 85% of former delinquents desist from offending”.

Interest in childhood/adolescence and in the stability of antisocial behavior throughout offenders’ lives had grown rapidly by the late 1980s and early 1990s. Some scholars called for a *developmental criminology* (Le Blanc and Loeber, 1990). The term often used to describe this emerging paradigm is *life-course criminology* (Sampson and Laub, 1990, 1992; Laub and Sampson, 1995, 2003) or *developmental and life-course criminology* (Farrington, 2003). Publishing enormous volume and noteworthy longitudinal researches on offending such as the Denver, Pittsburgh and Rochester study, the Seattle Social Development Project, the Dunedin study in New Zealand, the Montreal Longitudinal-Experimental study

and further analyses of the classic Gluecks' study by Sampson and Laub made *developmental life course criminology* paradigms became important during 1990s. Much of the research in this area was empirical and longitudinal, and was meant to examine both the predictors of offending (onset, persistence, and desistance) and the pathways of events that directed people into and out of crime (Farrington, 2003). The emergence of the notion of *criminal careers* which introduces the notion that offenders have careers much like people who work in the corporate world have careers also played a role in focusing attention on the life-course feature of crime (Blumstein et al., 1986; Blumstein, 1987; Piquero et al., 2003).

Farrington (2003) states that developmental and life-course crime theories examine three major issues; the development of offending and antisocial behavior, divergent risk factors at various ages, and the effects of life events. Thus, life-course crime theories are particularly concerned with analyzing individual changes in 'offending' throughout life. Blumstein et al. (1986), on the other hand, argue that life course crime theories can also be seen a further elaboration of the criminal career paradigm which became very famous in the 1980s by adding risk factors and life events. Piquero et al. (2003) similarly assert that developmental life-course theories constituted a response to criminal career paradigm because this paradigm shifting enhanced the knowledge of criminal career findings, such as onset, continuation, and desistance, yet it paid only minimal attention to risk factors and life events.

The life-course perspective was enhanced by the recognition that there is continuity or stability in antisocial conduct from childhood into adolescence and adulthood. Moreover, scholars also observed that the behavior of offenders can *change* or experience *discontinuity*. Childhood misconduct predicts later problem behavior, but the relationship is not clear. The key theoretical issue in life-course criminology is explaining both continuity and change in offending. Therefore, the life-course theories can be seen as divisible into three categories. Firstly, there are those theories that argue that there is *only continuity* in offending (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). Secondly, there are theories stating that offending is marked by *either continuity or change* (Thornberry, 1987; Moffitt, 1993). Thirdly, there are theories contending that offending is marked by *continuity and change* (Sampson and Laub, 1993). This framework of continuity and change will be also discussed in the article.

## 1. Life Course Theories

This study analyzes developmental and life-course criminology in five sections in terms of how they theorize criminality or crime, what kind of solutions they provide/offer, what are the similarities and differences amongst these theories, what are their strengths and weaknesses and what are their policy implications. The first section will focus on Gottfredson and Hirschi's general theory of crime, as control theory is one of the theories that shape life-course perspectives. To Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), low self-control leads individuals to a life of social failure and disobedient conduct from childhood. This section is followed by Thornberry's interactional theory of delinquency. Thornberry (1987) asserts that criminal behavior emerges in the context of the developmental process in which the person and the environment interact with one another. Moffitt's taxonomic theory of life-course persistent and adolescence-limited antisocial behavior will be presented in the third section. Moffitt (1987) has proposed that criminal development proceeds along two different pathways, one leading to persistent involvement in conduct problems and the second leading youths into and then out of crime. Her theory has been significantly influential and has generated extensive research and controversy. Laub and Sampson's life-course theory and early version of this theory (age-graded theory) will be tackled in the fourth section. Possibly the most significant life-course theory has been proposed by Sampson and Laub. Their work explores both continuity and change in offending across time and has evolved over the past decade (Sampson and Laub, 1993; Laub and Sampson, 2003). An overview of policy implications of the theory (fifth section) will conclude the article.

In addition to above mentioned theories, Patterson's social-interactional developmental model also suggests that antisocial behavior is a developmental deviance that persists throughout the life. Patterson et al. (1989:329) state that "antisocial behavior appears to be a developmental trait that begins early in life and often continues into adolescence and adulthood." They argue that the antisocial behavior is sourced from the family which applies harsh discipline, has little positive parental involvement with the child, and provides poor supervision. In such a family, the child learns how to behave against harsh applications such as coercion. This deviant behavior continues over his life, as long as he remains in the same social-interactional process. However, Patterson et al. theory will not be included in this article because of this theory does not provide another approach then the following four theories.

### ***1.1. Gottfredson and Hirschi's General Theory of Crime***

Gottfredson and Hirschi's theory of low self-control and crime has relevance to life-course theories because Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argued that traditional theories ignored the connection between crime and childhood problems and the continuity in problem behavior. In Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) view, an underlying factor of deviant behavior is low self-control during childhood and individual differences in criminal propensities that have their origins largely in childhood. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1995) assert that individual differences in self-control are the main determinant of stability in disobedience from childhood to adulthood. In this situation, low self-controlled youths select similar friends or groups for themselves. It creates a persistent heterogeneity that people carry all over their life course, along with certain other conditions that change the offender and his life situation, which makes such offender more likely to continue committing crime.

Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990:108) *General Theory of Crime* created a crisis in criminology because it made a prevailing case that existing theories were deficient due to the fact that current popular criminological theories do not analyze the stability of individual differences in offending over the life course. After a century of research, crime theories remain inattentive to the fact that people differ in the likelihood that they will commit crimes and that these differences appear early and remain stable over much of the life course.

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) proposed a theory of *stability* or *continuity* in offending. They argued that this stability is the result of "persistent heterogeneity" that people carry with them across situations at any one time and throughout their life courses. There is evidence that persistent individual differences play a role in accounting for continuity in offending (Nagin and Farrington, 1992). Gottfredson and Hirschi do not deny that change in offending can occur in an *intraindividual* way, that is, change occurs within an individual over time. Thus, once levels of self-control are established in childhood, a person with lower self-control will always be more involved in rebellious activities across the entire life course. In short, individual differences in self-control are durable and are not affected by social or other factors.

Life-course theorists argue that Gottfredson and Hirschi's general theory has the advantage of being parsimonious. However, their theory's simplicity seems to ignore the reality that other factors are involved in causing continuity in offending and that change is as much a part of crim-

inal careers as stability. Laub and Sampson (2003) argue that traditional social control theory cannot possibly explain how or why individuals still commit crimes (white collar crimes) even though they are socially bonded and have a strong sub culture.

There are other important factors that are equally important as social control in the understanding of desisting and offending within the context of crime over time. All the developmental models (Laub and Sampson, 1993; Moffitt, 2003) reject the argument of Gottfredson and Hirschi that the cause of crime and deviance is formed in childhood and continues in the same vein at all ages. Instead, life-course theorists assert that there is both change and persistence in deviant behavior and their models can explain it. Although Gottfredson and Hirschi's views have been challenged, their approach has provided important contributions towards the development of the life-course perspective.

### ***1.2. Thornberry's Interactional Theory of Delinquency***

Thornberry (1987) argues that he developed the interactional theory of delinquency to address three shortcomings of current theories of delinquency: (a) they rely on unidirectional causal structures in a static fashion, (b) they do not address the developmental progressions, and (c) they do not satisfactorily link a person's position in the social structure. Therefore, his theory is a reaction meant to overcome these three issues.

Thornberry (1987) developed his theory from the Durkheimian tradition of social control. Yet, he based his model on the core premise of control theory and social learning theory (Elliot, 1985). His basic model is that during childhood, adolescents develop attachments to parents and they are more likely to accept conventional beliefs, show a commitment to school, and avoid association with delinquent peers. However, when youths fail to develop strong attachments to parents, they do not develop either strong conventional beliefs or a strong commitment to school. Without these controls, they are free to explore other behavioral options where they encounter delinquent peers. Consistent with social learning theory, the association with antisocial friends fosters delinquent values and delinquent behavior (Thornberry, 1987). Elliott (1985) states that Thornberry's theory is an integrated theory that is heavily influenced by control and learning theories, and in a slighter way by strain and culture conflict theories. Thornberry (1987) responds to this criticism by claiming that his model is not an integrated theory but rather a theoretical elaboration.

According to Thornberry (1987), human behavior can only be explained by some models that focus on the interactive process because human behavior occurs in social interaction. (p. 864). This idea is significant because it suggests that the relationships between variables in Thornberry's model are not unidirectional but rather *interactive* or *reciprocal*. Thornberry (1996) concluded that interactional theory has empirical support that delinquent behavior is rooted in a set of mutually reinforcing causal networks.

In addition to analyzing reciprocal effects, Thornberry (1987) also realized that the effects of variables differ with a person's stage in the life course. As youths move from early to middle adolescence, the effects of parents' influence decrease and those of peers and school become more important. New bonds such as employment, college, military service and marriage can be established during late adolescence. These new variables play an important role in determining whether delinquency will continue or desist.

Thornberry has transformed interactional theory into a life-course approach and presented longitudinal evidence consistent with this perspective (Thornberry and Krohn, 2005; Thornberry et al., 2003). His revised theory develops his interactional model and seeks to explain why onset into misconduct might occur at three different stages of the life course (Thornberry and Krohn, 2005). Firstly, there are those who manifest conduct problems in childhood. This early onset is the result of exposure to family disorganization and ineffective parenting, school failure, and association with delinquent peers. Secondly, most youths start offending "in mid-adolescence, from about age 12 to age 16" (Thornberry and Krohn, 2005:192). These juveniles establish their autonomy from parents. As a result, parental control weakens and this reinforces deviant behaviors. Thirdly, there are "late bloomers" who wait until adulthood to begin offending. As Thornberry and Krohn (2005) note, previous studies show that 17.2 percent of non-delinquents begin offending in adulthood.

Thornberry's interest (2005) in explaining differential points of onset into and desistance from delinquency and crime are themes found across life-course theories. In fact, the debate over the nature and causes of continuity and change in offending is the central theoretical challenge to perspectives in the life-course paradigm. Although Thornberry's approach reflects the first perspective of life-course theories; he provides a structural approach and his theory is more theoretical than Laub and Sampson's (1993) theory: however, it has not been credited as Laub and

Samson's life-course theory because of following two reasons. In the first place, Laub and Sampson heavily built their approach on Gluecks's data and improved their discussion by qualitative data methods in which they interviewed 52 men that formed part of the Gluecks' data. Secondly, Thornberry's theory did not grasp the scholars' attention as much as Laub and Sampson's theory in terms of testing and providing empirical research.

Thornberry and Christenson (1984) conducted a research on a sampling of young adult males at the individual level to find out the reciprocal causal structure for unemployment and criminal involvement. They found that one way models, neither from unemployment to crime nor from crime to unemployment, were adequate to show the relationship which presents strong support for a reciprocal model of crime causation. Liska and Reed (1985) tested the relationship among three control theory variables: attachment to parents, success in school and delinquency. The results were fairly different for blacks and whites and the relationship between the three variables indicated a reciprocal causal structure rather than one way relations as Thornberry suggested.

### ***1.3. Moffitt's Taxonomic Theory of Adolescence-Limited and Life-Course-Persistent Theory***

Terrie Moffitt, in her developmental theory, argued that offending is marked by either continuity or change (Moffitt, 1993; Caspi and Moffitt, 1995). The age-group curve is unreliable because the jump in offending during the teenage years "conceals two qualitatively distinct categories of individuals, each in need of its own distinct theoretical explanation" (Caspi and Moffitt, 1995:494). One group is small, consisting of 5% to 10% of the male population; the antisocial proportion of the population for females is even lower. This group manifests antisocial behaviors during childhood and shows *continuity* in misconduct into and beyond adolescence. Moffitt called members of this group *life-course-persistent* offenders (LCPs). A second group is large and includes most youths during their juvenile years. The members of this group evidence little or no antisocial tendencies during childhood but suddenly engage in a range of delinquent acts during adolescence, only to stop offending as they mature into young adulthood. Due to the fact that their antisocial behavior is restricted to this one stage of development, Moffitt called this group *adolescence-limited* offenders (ALs). Thus, the offending or antisocial conduct of the ALs is marked by *change* or *discontinuity*, not by continuity.



Similarly to Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), Moffitt (1993) indicated that antisocial behavior at any one stage of development is a reflection of *contemporary continuity* that reflects persistent heterogeneity of criminal propensities. Unlike Gottfredson and Hirschi, Moffitt argued that stability of antisocial behavior is also fundamentally affected by *cumulative continuity* in that the actions of youngsters and the reactions to them essentially trap them in a stable antisocial role.

Moffitt is of the opinion that adolescents confront a fundamental developmental problem and that they are biologically mature, capable of sexual behavior, and desirous of assuming adult social roles. However, modern society is structured in such a way that youths are expected to refrain from sexual relationships and to wait until their late teens to engage in adult behaviors (e.g., smoking, consumption of goods). They suffer, in short, from a “maturity gap” that is a source of dissatisfaction and a potential motivation for misbehavior. In Moffitt’s (1993:688) view, antisocial conduct is not simply discovered but rather *learned* through a process of *social mimicry*. In part, delinquency can be modeled from older youths. Moffitt proposed, however, that critical sources of delinquent modeling are the LCPs. During childhood, ALs largely rejected LCPs. Now, during adolescence, LCPs emerge as role models because they appear more mature; they break rules, drink, smoke, and are more sexually active. They become “magnets” for ALs and “trainers for new recruits” into delinquency.

Moffitt and Caspi (2001) report a comparison on childhood risk factors of males and females from Dunedin’s longitudinal study, which is intended to find out the exhibiting childhood-onset and adolescent-onset antisocial behavior. They find that childhood-onset females had high-risk backgrounds but adolescent onset females did not, which is consistent with core predictions from the taxonomic theory of life-course persistent and adolescence-limited antisocial behavior. Moffitt et al., (2002) followed the same group all the way to age 26. The adolescent-onset delinquents at 26 years were less extreme but experienced elevated problems with respect to mental health, substance dependence, and property offenses. A third group of men who had been aggressive as children but did not exhibit delinquent behavior as adolescents emerged as low-level chronic offenders. These findings support the theory of life-course-persistent and adolescence-limited antisocial behavior and even go so far as to extend it.

McGloin et al. (2006) conducted a research to test the Moffitt's taxonomic theory on maternal cigarette smoking (MCS). They used the longitudinal data on African American cohorts to find out if MCS is associated with problematic outcomes and criminal offending. The research found no evidence of such a mediating relationship and they argue for the need for future research in this field.

Moffitt's (1993) perspective is theoretically elegant and is shaping criminological research and thinking in important ways. However, it will continue to receive at least two types of challenges. First and foremost, the question arises as to whether offenders can be divided precisely into two groups (Moffitt et al., 1996). There is some research, for example, suggesting that there might be two different kinds of LCPs: those who commit criminal acts at a high rate and those whose offending is chronic but at a low rate (Nagin et al., 1995). There might even be ALs who participate in crime at high and low levels (D'Unger et al., 1998). Furthermore, in a recent study of Dutch offenders from age 12 to age 72, Blokland et al. (2005) detected four groups: those who offended periodically, those who offended at low rates before desisting, those who offended at moderate rates before desisting, and those who persisted in offending at high rates. These findings suggest that a two-group theory might be too parsimonious to capture the full complexity of the ways in which development into and out of crime occurs. Secondly, scholars such as Gottfredson and Hirschi (1995) would contend that the search for a typology of offenders is wrong in that any differences in levels of offending reflect not a *qualitative* difference between people but merely a *quantitative* difference in the underlying levels of criminal propensities. That is, LCPs and ALs do not really exist but are rather invented when scholars take a distribution of offenders and draw artificial cutoff points in their data.

Moffitt has not remained silent on these issues and she presents evidence that is largely consistent with the causal processes outlined in her theory (Moffitt et al., 2001; Moffitt, 2006). Moffitt recognizes that virtually any theory will need to be revised as it is tested. Moffitt (2006) notes that in addition to the LCPs and ALs, there may be a third group of low-level chronic offenders. She also calls for more research on the extent to which adolescence-limited offending can have enduring effects in adulthood, thus making adjustments problematic. She also admits that as LCPs move deep into adulthood, desistance is likely. Even so, Moffitt asserts that her two-group typology explains much of the variation in the development of offending.

#### ***1.4. Laub and Sampson's Life Course Theory***

A fourth approach in life-course theory suggests that offending is marked by continuity and changes across time. Sampson and Laub (1993) projected this theory to explain crime over the life course through a *theory of age-graded informal social control* in their book *Crime in the Making*. They attempted to revisit Hirschi's (1969) original social bond theory. Hirschi examined the impact of social bonds on youngsters. Unlike Hirschi, Sampson and Laub indicated that social bond theory can explain the understanding of continuity and change in offending across the entire life course from childhood, to adolescence, and into adulthood. Furthermore, Sampson and Laub (1993) introduced the idea of "social capital," which is the "capital" or resources produced by the quality of relationships between people and they argued that social bonds strengthen as social capital rises. Unlike Moffitt (1993), they denied that continuity characterizes a distinct set of offenders and that change characterizes a second distinct set of offenders. Sampson and Laub maintained that the life course is potentially dynamic, meaning that even LCPs can reestablish bonds during adulthood that can divert them from crime.

Sampson and Laub (1990) theorized that their causal model exists within a structural context that is shaped by larger historical and macro-level forces. They contended that what goes on inside the family, for example, is influenced by "structural background factors" such as poverty, residential mobility, family size, employment, and immigrant status (Sampson and Laub, 1994). There are "child effects" on the social environment. During the first stages of life, the most significant social control process is found in the family, which is an instrument for both direct and indirect controls. In families where discipline is harsh and where children and parents reject one another, bonds are weak and delinquency is the likely result. If youths have a strong attachment to their families, these processes mediate the effects of structural factors on youth misconduct (Laub et al., 2001). Consistently with Gottfredson and Hirschi's view, however, these individual differences appear to have some independent effects on antisocial conduct across the life course. Finally, beyond the family, juvenile delinquency is fostered by weak school attachments and attachments to delinquent peers.

Sampson and Laub (1992, 1993) showed that delinquency weakens adult social bonds by making stable employment and rewarding marriages less likely, which in turn fosters continued criminality. Incarceration, another likely outcome of persistent criminal involvement, helps to stabil-

ize crime by weakening social bonds. Ten years later, in their *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives*, Laub and Sampson (2003) revised their theory. Although retaining the core components of their social bond perspective, they expanded their analysis of the process of desistance, suggesting that stopping crime was the result of the convergence of several factors and of "human agency." The recent elaboration of their perspective represents a critique of both Gottfredson and Hirschi's self control theory of continuity in offending and of Moffitt's two-group developmental theory of antisocial conduct.

Laub and Sampson (2003) extended the Gluecks' data set by studying the 500 males defined as delinquents in the original data set until they were age 70 (they had been followed until age 32 by the Gluecks). In this research, they examined the criminal records of these 500 offenders and also conducted interviews with 52 of the men. These qualitative data were important because they allowed Laub and Sampson to explore more deeply the question of why these offenders persisted and, in particular, desisted from crime. This supplied them with an enriched understanding of the process of continuity and change. Furthermore, tracing the sample until old age (or death) allowed them to conduct a *life-course* study. Most previous longitudinal projects had followed respondents only into early adulthood. As a result, these projects were limited in their ability to explore the nature of offending patterns into middle and later adulthood, and they were unable to study how childhood and adolescent experiences predict criminal conduct across the adult years.

Laub and Sampson (2003, 2005) present two key findings by analyzing the data across the entire life course. Firstly, it appears that desistance from crime, even among high-rate offenders, is virtually universal. Unless death intervenes first, everyone eventually stops breaking the law. Secondly, it is difficult to predict when desistance will occur. Events occurring earlier in life, such as childhood risk factors, do not seem to differentiate the point at which crime is surrendered (Sampson and Laub, 1995, 2005; Laub and Sampson, 2003). These findings are a direct challenge to Moffitt's (1993) views on life-course persistent offenders. It appears that LCPs do not persist indefinitely in their offending. Moffitt (2006:300-301) has responded that the males in the Gluecks' sample continued high-rate offending into middle adulthood, while most young men in their cohort population desisted.

Laub and Sampson (2003) identify four aspects in the process of desistance during adulthood. In the first place, consistently with their earlier

work, they argue that structural turning points such as marriage, employment, and military service set the stage for change. Unlike Gottfredson and Hirschi, they do not see entry into these social arrangements as simply due to self-selection. Secondly, also consistently with their earlier theorizing, they contend that these structural events create social bonds that increase the informal controls over offenders. Thirdly, while departing from a strict control theory, they observe that as offenders move into marriages and jobs, their daily routine activities change from unstructured and focused in deviant locations (e.g., bars) to structured and filled with prosocial responsibilities. As a result, offenders are cut off from deviant associates and other “bad influences.” Fourthly, Laub and Sampson (2003) assert that the desistance process does not fully determine the choices of offenders. They observed that these individuals have a subjective reality and offenders are active participants in the journey, whether resisting or voluntarily participating in opportunities to desist from crime.

There are two potential challenges, however, that Sampson and Laub’s (2003) theory will have to address because of the critiques of their life-course theory. Firstly, by embracing social bond theory, Sampson and Laub attributed the crime-reducing effects of quality family life during childhood and of adult conventional relationships to *social control*. Social bonds like marriage and employment may foster control, but they also may be contexts that attract individuals away from antisocial peers and into contact with prosocial influences (Warr, 1998; Wright and Cullen, 2004). Notably, in their updated theory, Sampson and Laub addressed this limitation of their perspective and expanded their discussion of the change process. According to Sampson et al. (2006), marriage has a crime reduction of approximately thirty-five percent in compared to unmarried people. Theobald and Farrington (2011) assert that men who marry at an early age reduce their offending behavior after marriage; unlike those who marry at later ages as younger women have more influence to their counterparts on their offending behaviors. Secondly, Sampson and Laub’s perspective may be seen as representing a continuing competition with Gottfredson and Hirschi’s self-control theory and, more generally, with life-course theories attributing continuity in offending to underlying individual differences. Once again, by demonstrating the salience of social bonds across the life course, Sampson and Laub wanted to respond to Gottfredson and Hirschi’s stance by claiming that social processes outside of childhood are relevant to the level of criminality that people manifest. However, it is not easy in the end to answer the question of whether continuity is caused by self-control or social bonds. Sampson

and Laub would argue that trajectories in crime are caused not by one type of variable or another but rather by the *intersection* of individual and social conditions. People may, to some extent, be the architects of their lives, but they also become embedded in life courses that dramatically constrain their current choices and likely futures. Laub and Sampson (2004) found, by interviewing 52 men from Gluecks' data, that these men were not only shaped by their personal and social circumstances but also by the trajectories of their lives. However, it was very difficult to measure and operationalize why some of them desisted along the trajectories and why some of them did not.

Laub and Sampson's work was heavily critiqued by some scholars because of the fact that the Gluecks' data sample consisted entirely of white males who grew up during the 1950s; thus an analyses of these data is limited within this sample of these white men (Giordano et al., 2002). Another critique is made by Hirschi and Gottfredson (1995) who argue that criminologists can examine the causal relationship between their variables and delinquency through *cross-sectional* research. They think that the results of *longitudinal* research designs will be no different than those of cross sectional designs; therefore the former would be a waste of time. On the other hand, Laub and Sampson (2003) argue that what happens at one stage in life often affects what happens at another stage in life and only cohort studies can unfold this reality. When *longitudinal* research design was employed, it showed that involvement in crime during early adolescence was related to criminal conduct during early adulthood and late adolescence. Another critique of Laub and Sampson's work is the question that: is it really a theory? One must consider the issue that they had very old data from 1950s and hypothesized a theory form this non-probability only white male samples which is an important limitation for a theory.

## **2. Policy Implications of Life Course Theories**

Policy implications of life-course theories would be consistent with social control, social bond, and social learning theories. If the roots of crime lie in the first years of life, then the most effective way of preventing crime is through early intervention programs. These programs tend to concentrate on three areas: parental training, improving the cognitive development of children, and reversing early manifestations of conduct problems (Farrington, 1998). These programs can be delivered from the prenatal period and infancy through the school years.

Parent training programs should be the starting point because research supports that early onset of delinquency is one of the best predictor of future criminal careers. The goal of early intervention is to decrease the risk factors for the onset of offending and to increase the protective factors. When an antisocial life course is initiated, the task is to intervene to divert a youngster from this trajectory. An example of this kind of program could be how David Olds and his colleagues developed the “Prenatal and Early Childhood Nurse Home Visitation Program” in Elmira, New York, and then later in Memphis, Tennessee (Olds et al., 1998). The program focused on first-time, low-income mothers who were at risk of having antisocial children. This study revealed that nurse visitation limited the targeted risk factors and lowered consequent misconduct.

Laub et al. (1995) assert that life-course perspectives brings a new way of crime prevention policy that the key idea should be developing an individual’s social bond’s to society. Besides parental training, building strong school ties and community ties during adolescence and adulthood is also a key factor to keep the individual out of delinquent peers. The early intervention strategy for crime prevention is a “liberal” one. Unlike the conservatives’ approach, it advocates “get tough” policies that come up short because they ignore the underlying causes of persistent antisocial conduct. In addition to early intervention, life-course research suggests the discovery of new strategies for those who are not “saved” as youngsters but persist in their offending into adulthood. It may recommend a policy of long-term incarceration for high-rate criminals. However, as Laub and Sampson (2003) note, this approach has unpredictable consequences because imprisonment may increase recidivism by weakening social bonds with respect to core institutions. In this case, a specially developed treatment program will ease the reentry process of offenders without losing their important social bonds.

## **Conclusion**

Many criminological theories focus on the first part of a person’s life, childhood. Some of them claim that delinquency in the childhood is the result of weak family bonds, or status frustration and blockage of goals make a child criminal, or gang culture and differential associations lead a juvenile to commit crime. As most of the crime theories suggest, recent research shows that delinquency in the childhood is the best predictor of delinquency in the adulthood. Alternatively, developmental life course theories try to explain the offending from the childhood to the adoles-

cence and from that point to the adulthood and they bring a fresh idea to look over the offending with the social and structural components of the life.

Developmental life- course criminology focuses on three dimension of continuity of criminality over life. As no theory is completed fully, there are various questions and limitations that life-course theorists should answer and develop as Farrington (2003) suggests. Cullen (2011) argues that adolescence-limited criminology (ALC) paradigm has been dominated criminology for over a half century which embraces “nothing works” approach to control crime. However, a new paradigm, capable of improving offenders’ lives and reducing crime, is definitely needed in life-course criminology. On the other hand, future longitudinal studies should follow people up to later ages and focus on persistence and desistance processes by understanding risk factors and life events for males, females and for different ethnic and racial groups.

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