Marc OUIMET et Marc LEBLANC

RESPECTIVEMENT CRIMINOLOGUE, ÉCOLE DE CRIMINOLOGIE,
ET PROFESSEUR, ÉCOLE DE PSYCHO-ÉDUCATION
UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTRÉAL

(Janvier 1993)

*“Life events in the course
of the adult criminal career”*

Un document produit en version numérique par Jean-Marie Tremblay, bénévole,
professeur de sociologie au Cégep de Chicoutimi

Courriel: jean-marie_tremblay@uqac.ca

Site web pédagogique : <http://www.uqac.ca/jmt-sociologue/>

Dans le cadre de la collection: "Les classiques des sciences sociales"

Site web: <http://classiques.uqac.ca/>

Une collection développée en collaboration avec la Bibliothèque
Paul-Émile-Boulet de l'Université du Québec à Chicoutimi

Site web: <http://bibliotheque.uqac.ca/>

Cette édition électronique a été réalisée par Jean-Marie Tremblay, bénévole, professeur de sociologie au Cégep de Chicoutimi à partir de :

Marc OUIMET ET Marc LEBLANC

“**Life events in the course of the adult criminal career**”. Un article publié dans la revue **Criminal Behavior and Mental Health**, vol. 6, no 1, janvier 1993, pp. 75-97.

M Marc Ouimet, criminologue, nous a accordé le 11 septembre 2006 son autorisation de diffuser électroniquement cet article et Monsieur Leblanc nous a permis de diffuser toutes ses publications le 23 mai 2005.

Courriel : marc.ouimet@umontreal.ca ou ouimetm@ere.umontreal.ca
marc.leblanc@umontreal.ca

Polices de caractères utilisée :

Pour le texte: Times New Roman, 14 points.

Pour les citations : Times New Roman, 12 points.

Pour les notes de bas de page : Times New Roman, 12 points.

Édition électronique réalisée avec le traitement de textes Microsoft Word 2004 pour Macintosh.

Mise en page sur papier format
LETTRE (US letter), 8.5” x 11”)

Édition numérique réalisée le 22 novembre 2006 à Chicoutimi,
Ville de Saguenay, province de Québec, Canada.

Table des matières

Introduction

1. FACTORS LINKED WITH CONTINUATION OF THE CRIMINAL CAREER
 - 1.1. The age factor
 - 1.2. Life experiences
2. MATURATION
3. AGE, LIFE EVENTS AND MATURATION
4. DATA AND ANALYSES
5. RESULTS
 - 5.1. Participation in crime on reaching majority
 - 5.2. Life Experiences
 - Family Life
 - Occupational Life
 - The Use of Illicit Drugs
 - 5.3. Global Analysis
 - Family Life
 - Occupational Life
 - Use of Illicit Drugs
 - The Age
 - 5.4. ANALYSIS ACCORDING TO AGE
6. DISCUSSION

References

Marc OUIMET ET Marc LEBLANC

"Life events in the course of the adult criminal career".¹

Un article publié dans la revue **Criminal Behavior and Mental Health**, vol. 6, no 1, janvier 1993, pp. 75-97.

Introduction

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

During the past twenty years or so, prominent among explanations of delinquent behavior have been a number of interesting ideas concerning the initiation of a criminal career. The psychologists focus mainly on the criminal personality, sociologists on delinquent sub-cultures and criminologists on social control and factors linked with the decision to act out. Few studies, however, have dealt with the factors that cause offenders to continue or to stop their criminal careers (Loeber and LeBlanc, 1990). This imbalance in the research efforts is surprising since there is no reason to believe that the factors explaining the onset of delinquent behavior are the same as those explaining the continuation or termination of the criminal career. To help fill this void, the present study looks at the impact of a certain number of life experiences and the subject's age on the continuation of criminal activity during adult life. These experiences concern family and occupational situations as well as the consumption of illicit drugs. The period studied are the years between eighteen, the age of majority, and the early thirties.

¹ Our thanks to FCAR, CQRS and SSHRCC for their support of this project and to Alfred Blumstein, Jacqueline Cohen, Daniel Nagin and Rolf Loeber for their participation in the planning of this article.

1. FACTORS LINKED WITH CONTINUATION OF THE CRIMINAL CAREER

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

The empirical research on the criminal conduct of adults is mostly descriptive; it deals with the participation, frequency and diversity of this conduct as well as other synthetic characteristics (see the inventory of Blumstein *et al.*, 1986, and the works of LeBlanc and Fréchette, 1989). Studies on the connection between age and criminal activity are numerous and are the subject of strong controversy. Outside of the age factor, other potential factors responsible for the continuation of the criminal activity have received little attention. Hence theories explaining the continuation or termination of the criminal career are yet to be developed.

1.1 The age factor

Since the work of Quételet in the mid-nineteenth century, numerous authors have traced a curve of criminal activity as plotted against age (see Wilson and Herrnstein, 1985). According to this curve, the period between the end of adolescence and the mid-twenties is the most criminally active. Although the curve does not vary in time or space (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990), it cannot be said that the average individual frequency follows a similar pattern. According to Blumstein *et al.* (1986, 1988), the individual frequency of criminal offending does not vary during the entire period of a person's activity, but the curve age/crime is due to variations in the percentage of individuals taking part in crime at each age. Thus participation in crime, that is, the percentage of persons of a certain age group taking part in crime, will vary from age to age, whereas the individual frequency of the crimes committed will remain stable over the period comprised between the beginning and the end of a person's criminal career.

As this controversy clearly shows, the age factor is particularly important to an understanding of the adult criminal career. The age of the person is linked with the sum of his experiences. Marriage, entering the job market and the consumption of psycho-active drugs follow a sequence closely connected with a person's age. Furthermore, certain of these events in a person's life can be linked with criminal activity (Loeber and LeBlanc, 1990). Consequently, if the participation in crime diminishes as the age increases, it may be because of certain events conducive to giving up the criminal career.

1.2 Life experiences

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

One life event conducive to the abandoning of the criminal career is incarceration. Reviews of the early literature (Mannheim, 1965), like the most recent meta-analyses (Whitehead and Lab, 1989; Lipsey, 1989; Andrews *et al.*, 1990), establish incarceration as the determining factor in terminating the criminal activity. Two elements seem that to make incarceration a factor in stopping criminal careers are deterrence and treatment. When interviewed, offenders said that it was the accumulation of prison sentences that forced them to reevaluate the cost associated with their criminal activities (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986). On the other hand, it was certain forms of treatment during imprisonment that resulted in a lessening of subsequent criminal activity (Murray and Cox, 1979; LeBlanc, 1983). In the present study, the impact of incarceration on the continuation of the criminal career cannot be fully analyzed due to the fact that we do not have precise data on incarceration. We must therefore put the emphasis on other factors of continuation and desistance.

The ceasing of criminal activity on reaching adulthood, according to Elliott *et al.* (1989), varies according to a person's socio-demographic characteristics. At the end of adolescence, desistance is more likely among women than men, among whites than blacks, and among middle class persons than the disadvantaged. Hence, there is a greater probability that men, blacks and the disadvantaged will continue their

offending during their twenties (Kempf, 1990; Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1987).

Moreover, longitudinal studies have shown the effect of certain events on the continuation of the criminal career. Men who marry commit fewer crimes and are less deviant once they are married (West, 1982; Rand, 1987; Laub and Sampson, 1990), particularly if they marry a "conventional" woman (Bachman *et al.*, 1978; West, 1982). However, the fact of having children does not affect the process of abandonment (Rand, 1987). Work is another factor associated with the ending of the criminal career (Thornberry and Christenson, 1984; Good *et al.*, 1986; Laub and Sampson, 1990).

There is one element, the use of psycho-active drugs, which is not in itself a life experience, but about whose presence in the life of offenders there is no doubt (Wilson and Herrnstein, 1985; LeBlanc and Tremblay, 1986). The drug/crime relationship has been the subject of numerous studies over the past few years and there has been much controversy over the role of drugs in the criminal career (Tonry and Morris, 1991). The research of Nurco *et al.* (1988) shows that the abandoning of hard drugs was linked with a rapid diminution in the number of crimes committed by drug addicts. Considering the amount of alcohol and illicit drugs consumed by the subjects of this study (Leiter, 1992), this element should be further analyzed.

Although it is very likely that certain events in a person's life are responsible for the ending of a criminal career, it is difficult to distinguish the causal relationship between the factors in question. For example, two models can connect marriage and desistance from crime: a) the offender decides simultaneously to mend his ways, abandon his criminal career and get married; and b) the offender marries and then decides to abandon his criminal career because he wants to save his marriage. In the first example, marriage has no causal effect, whereas in the second, the marriage plays the preponderant role in explaining desistance.

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) question the causal relationship between marriage and crime and between occupation and crime. The problem for these authors is the effect of the type of persons these in-

dividuals select in their marriage or employment. The least habituated offenders will marry the most "conventional" women, will have better jobs and will be the quickest to abandon their criminal careers. The most habituated offenders will not marry (they do not like control), will not be able to keep a job (they do not like the constraints involved in being a worker) and will take much longer to abandon their criminal activities. Thus, according to Gottfredson and Hirschi, the correlation observed between marriage or occupation and crime simply reflect partiality in the offenders' selection regarding marriage or employment.

Although the objections of Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) seem valid where occupation is concerned, it is not certain that they apply in the case of the marriage/crime relationship. In fact, if the most habituated offenders are seen to have "little personal control", would they not be more prone than others to marry when very young? Very often marriage is entered into with little forethought and in the optimistic euphoria of the first months of a love relationship. Any beneficial effects of an early marriage, however, may be counterbalanced by financial difficulties and family discord. As West (1982) observed, marriage among very young adults has no connection with the extent of their offending, whereas marriage among former offenders of 21 and over has resulted in a lessening of criminal activities.

Whatever the explanation of the relationship between life experiences and the pursuit of a criminal career, the fact is that these experiences are not independent of one another, and it would therefore be a question of interpreting their impact without an appropriate theoretical approach. In criminology, it is the concept of maturation that makes it possible to interpret the relationship between life experiences and the ending of the criminal career.

2. MATURATION

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

In their article on developmental criminology, Loeber and LeBlanc (1990) concluded that criminological theories have not gone into the question of individual development sufficiently. This lack is particularly evident with regard to the reasons for the continuation and abandoning of criminal activity. As a matter of fact, the authors refer to the rather vague idea of maturation, whereby criminal activity is abandoned when the individual attains a certain level of maturity. This was the position of the Gluecks in 1943 and this point of view is still supported today by Elliott et al. (1989).

According to the terminology, personal and social control, proposed by Hirschi (1969), the abandoning of criminal activity must be seen as the result of an improvement in self control together with the development of stronger ties with conventional society. In the same vein, Sampson and Laub (1990) show that during adulthood, criminal activities are incompatible with steady employment, a harmonious family life and adequate upbringing of children, etc. They concluded that the development of social ties increases the probability that an offender will abandon his criminal career. LeBlanc (1992) also shows that suspension of criminal activity at the end of adolescence depends on the strengthening of social ties and increase in self control.

Thus, life events such as marriage or employment would be signs that a person's maturing process is taking place. On the other hand, the maturation is real only if the life experiences come within the scope of individual's search for an attachment and commitment to conventional social institutions. The concept of maturation proposed by Hirschi and Gottfredson (1990) to explain the abandoning of a criminal career is opposed to a purely situational explanation (Trasler, 1980; Sampson and Laub, 1990). The maturation model specifies that crime will diminish at adulthood regardless of the rest, whereas the situational ex-

planation predicts that life events will have a causal influence on the offending.

3. AGE, LIFE EVENTS AND MATURATION

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

Gottfredson and Hirschi's arguments (1990), showing that the situational theory of the withdrawal from criminal activity is incomplete, are convincing. How can these life experiences radically change an individual when his lack of self control is characteristic? On the other hand, it is unlikely that the abandonment would be due solely to the process of aging, as Gottfredson and Hirschi note. It would be better from the empirical point of view to consider age and life events two independent factors acting together on the continuation of criminal activity rather than credit one or the other. It is this perspective that we adopt in this article.

In analyzing the connection between age, life experiences and criminal activities, it must be remembered that life events are associated with particular age groups. For instance, marriage takes place more often at 25 than at 29. Thus age plays a determining role in terms of life events and criminal activities. For example, the fact of being unemployed at 18 will not have the same effect on the continuation of a criminal career as being unemployed at 28. Our analysis will take two forms. First, the relationship between life experiences and participation in crime will be examined for the entire period under study, that is, from 18 to 30 years of age. Next, more detailed analysis will be made to find out the respective impact of life events on the participation in crime at each age between 18 and 30. It will be a matter of observing the statistical relations between occupation, family life, drug consumption ... and participation in crime at 18, at 19, etc.

This method will make it possible to observe the possible changes in the relationship between the life events and the criminal activity. For example, it may happen that the consumption of illicit drugs will have no effect on the participation in crime at the beginning of the

twenties, whereas this same drug consumption will be instrumental in the continuation of the criminal career toward the end of the twenties. An analytical strategy of this kind can furnish detailed information on the processes in place in explaining adult crime and the abandoning of the criminal career.

4. DATA AND ANALYSES

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

In the mid-seventies, 396 boys, recruited from the Juvenile Court of Montreal, were interviewed. These youngsters were between 14 and 17 years of age at the time. Almost all of them told of their criminal activities during the interview and of an imposing official delinquency (see the description by LeBlanc and Fréchette, 1989). Most had been put on probation or placed in a home for juvenile delinquents. About fifteen years later, in 1990-1991, 238 of the subjects were located and interviewed. Of the 396 youths in the original group, by 1990, 27 had died, 118 could not be located and 45 refused to take part in the study. Preliminary analyses had shown that the 238 subjects interviewed were not statistically different from the others in terms of their social, psychological and criminological characteristics, as ascertained during their adolescence (LeBlanc, unpublished).

At the time of the last interview, at an average of 32 years of age, the subjects of the study were asked to describe their life situation from the time they were 18. Specific questions dealt with their family life, occupation and consumption of drugs. It was impossible at the time of the inquiry to consider all the life experiences that may have influenced the abandoning of the criminal career (for example, illness, victimizations, the death of someone close, etc.). It is very possible that certain of these life events, of limited prevalence, had a very strong influence on the criminal career. Only the variables belonging to one of these three elements - family life, occupational life and use of illicit drugs - will be statistically analyzed.

With regard to the criminal activities, only those conducts frequently committed are used to make up the dependent variable of the study. Thus the "criminally active" subject is the one who says he had committed at least one of the following crimes in the course of one year: burglary, assault and battery, armed robbery or receiving stolen goods. Generally speaking, 74.8% of the ex-wards of the Court questioned admitted they had already committed one of these four acts between the ages of 18 and 31.

After having described the participation in crime and the distribution of the life experiences in terms of age (Tables 1 and 2), the relation between the life events and pursuit of criminal activity are analyzed as a whole (Table 3). After that, more detailed analyses are conducted for each of the ages between 18 and 31 (Table 4).

5. RESULTS

5.1 Participation in crime on reaching majority

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

During the interview, the subjects had to say whether they had already committed various types of criminal activities since their eighteenth birthday. When they said they had already committed a particular crime, let us say burglary, they had to say between what ages they had committed these crimes. Thus, a youth who said he had committed burglaries from age 18 to 22 is considered criminally active at 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22. However, it isn't known for sure that the subject had committed at least one burglary at each age between 18 and 22. Since this figure is approximate, it is impossible to count the number of crimes committed at each age. It would have been difficult to think that that anyone could tell us the precise number and type of crime committed at each age over the course of the past fourteen years. Table 1 shows the proportion of criminally active subjects at each age between 18 and 31.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

(Tableau non disponible)

In the first few years of adulthood, 28% of the subjects were active in the crime of burglary, but the percentage quickly diminished. At 31 years of age, only 5% of the former wards of the Juvenile Court were active for this type of crime. A third of the men were active in the receiving of stolen goods from the age of 18 to 25, and in the first years of adulthood, almost 20% of them were active in armed robbery and assault and battery; however there were fewer of these activities after the age of 24.

Finally, Table 1 shows that more than half the subjects say they had been criminally active from the age of 18 to 25. After 25, the percentage of active subjects studied at 31 years of age drops to 18%. According to these results, it is possible to say that the prevalence of the participation crime by former juvenile delinquents during their adult years is relatively constant from age 18 to the mid-twenties. In their early twenties, about 55% of the subjects take part in acts of burglary, armed robbery, assault and battery and receiving stolen goods. After 25, fewer and fewer men engage in crime. Only 20% say they were still criminally active at the beginning of their thirties.

Blumstein and Cohen (1982) observe that the rate at which the criminal career is abandoned does not increase consistently with age: the large majority of offenders stop during their twenties, a few stop in their thirties, and the others cease their activities during their forties. Thus 18% of the former wards of the Court must have continued their activities to the age of forty since they were still active at the beginning of the thirties. Our results show that the activities cease mainly in the second half of the twenties. Any measure to promote the abandoning of criminal careers should therefore take place at the very beginning of the twenties or about five years before the natural process of stopping occurs.

In addition to the data describing the continuation of criminal activity in adulthood, there is information on its duration. Table 2 records the number of years the men actively engage in one of the four types of crime during the fourteen years of study, from the age of 18 to 31. A quarter of the men (60 out of 238 subjects, or 25%) reported no

criminal activity during the period under study, 16 reported only one year of activity (7%) and only 32 subjects were active in each of the fourteen years (14%). For the men who were criminally active for at least one year (75%), the average duration of the activities was 8.8 years.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE
(Tableau non disponible)

Having described the results observed concerning the life events experiences by the subjects of our study, we now proceed with statistical analyses to determine the factors that explain the subjects' participation in crime during their twenties.

5.2 Life Experiences

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

This study is based on the hypothesis that life events have a determining effect on participation in crime at the adult level. The experiences in life concerned are family life, occupational situation and the use of illicit drugs. Let us first analyze the distribution of these experiences in relation to age.

Family Life

It is difficult today to describe the status of a couple because of the various lifestyles - cohabitation, separation and divorce, etc. Marriage, whether a person is married or not, cannot be a reliable indicator of a person's real family situation. According to the social control theory (Hirschi, 1969), a person who shares the same roof with a woman, wife or mate, has "more to lose" by going to prison following an arrest. Also, according to the theory of routine activities (Felson and Cohen, 1980), the person who has a life partner should spend less time away from the house, thus reducing his exposure to criminal opportunities. Since our interest here is to find out the impact of a couple relationship on participation in crime, every man who shares his roof with

a woman will be considered "married". It is impossible, however, for us to assess the impact of the marriage on the participation in crime by the quality of the conjugal relationship between the two partners. The quality of the relationship, however, defined by the family atmosphere, might very well be a key factor in understanding the statistical relationship between marriage and crime (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986).

Table 1 shows the proportion of subjects married at each age between 18 and 31. At 18, 22% of the wards of the Court had a mate. At age 29, 49% of the men were living with someone or were married. Between the ages of 18 and 24 the increase in the number of married subjects is greatest. Table 2 shows that 80% of the subjects under study had lived for at least one year with a mate, and on the average, for 6.6 years.

A person's family life is also a question of procreation. It may well be imagined that the arrival of a child can certainly upset a young man's life. It is quite possible that career criminals may be tempted to stop their criminal activities when they have a child or two. The strength of the relationship between procreation and participation in crime will depend, of course, on the quality of the union between husband and wife. According to Table 1, about 5% of the subject studied had a child at each age between 20 and 31. There was no particular moment during the twenties for procreation among the subjects of the study. Table 2 shows that 42% of the subjects, between the ages of 18 and 31, had at least one child.

Occupational Life

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

The way a person occupies his time should influence the extent of his participation in crime. For all sorts of reasons, work seems to be incompatible with a criminal lifestyle. For example, a person who has a job would be less tempted by crime because he has an income, has little available free time, hangs around public places less often and has a great deal to lose if incarcerated, etc. In spite of all these reasons,

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) question the causal link between employment and crime, and state that the data resulting from research on the subject have only succeeded in showing a tenuous link between these two phenomena.

The dichotomy "employed/unemployed" was considered too restricting to account for what the subjects of the study were doing each year between the ages of 18 and 31. Thus the occupations of these former wards of the Court were categorized as follows: work - if the subject had kept a legal type of job for the greater part of the year; dependent - if the subject had lived mainly on social welfare or unemployment insurance during the course of the year; illegal work - if the subject had lived chiefly by moonlighting; and incarceration - if the subject had spent the major part of the year in prison. It must be remembered that the data available came from the answers of the subjects themselves during a face-to-face interview.

Table 1 shows that between 40% and 50% of the men had held legitimate jobs for the major part of the year from the age of 18 to 30. Incarceration follows with about 20% of the subjects, while financial dependency and illegal work characterized about 10% at each age under study. Although the percentages vary little from one age to the other for each of these categories, the subjects often change their occupational status, as shown by the data in Table 2. In fact, 82% of them worked for at least a year (on average, for 7.8 years), 43% of them spent at least a year on social welfare (on average for 2.9 years) and 34% of the subjects said they had lived at least a year on the fruits of illegal deals (on the average for 4.2 years). Finally, 44% of the subjects spent at least a year behind bars. Among the 105 men who had spent at least a year in prison, the average number of years served was 6.2.

The Use of Illicit Drugs

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

Drug consumption is widespread among juvenile delinquents and adult criminals. Wilson and Herrnstein (1985) show how dependence on hard drugs alters the conjugal, occupational and social life of an offender, indirectly causing an increase in his criminal activities. The role of drug consumption in the etiology of delinquency is still ambiguous, and little research has been done on the role of illicit drugs in the continuation of adult crime. However, the fact that an adult uses hard drugs is a fairly good predictor of his future criminal activity (Greenwood, 1982). Our hypothesis here is that, in the case of the adults studied, the consumption of illicit drugs will retard the abandoning of the criminal career.

During the interview, the subjects were asked about their drug taking habits over the past 14 years. Four categories of substances were used for the analysis, hard drugs (heroin, morphine, opium, cocaine and crack), chemical drugs (PCP, XTC, MMDA, Benzedrine, Methaqualine, speed, amphetamines and barbiturates), non-prescribed medicines and soft drugs (hashish and marijuana). During the interview, the subjects first named the substances they had already used, and, for the selected substances, they had to say between what ages they had taken them. A subject who reported having used cocaine between the ages of 20 and 23 was considered a consumer of hard drugs at 20, 21, 22 and 23.

Table 1 shows the prevalence of the use of different types of drugs for the subjects between the ages of 18 and 31. About 80% of young adults smoke marijuana, the percentage diminishing rapidly after the age of 28. In all, 88% of the subjects said they had already taken soft drugs between 18 and 31 (Table 2). For the chemical drugs, 45% took them at 18, the percentage dropping after the age of 22. During the 14 years of the study, 58% of the former wards took one of the chemical drugs at least once. The non-prescription medicines were also popular among the subjects of the sample. Almost 30% took these medicines

between the ages of 18 and 25, and 45% of the adults interviewed admitted having used non-prescription medicines at least once since they reached adulthood. Finally, drug consumption increases with age: it goes from 25% at 18 to 47% of the subjects at 28.

Although the consumption of chemical drugs, soft drugs and medicines is frequent in the early twenties, they become less frequent after the age of 25. Hard drugs are the exception to this rule. This is no doubt due to the popularity of cocaine during the eighties. It is well to note that such levels of illicit drug consumption are much higher than those observed, under the same experimental conditions, for the male population in general (Leiter, 1992).

5.3 Global Analysis

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

The data presented so far has described the participation in crime of former wards of the court over the first fourteen years of their adult life. Their life experiences in connection with family, occupation and drug consumption show the type of course followed by these former juvenile delinquents as adults. In general, it can be said that the situation of these subjects as improved as they grew older. It seems that the twenty-fifth year marks a turning point and an important period of transition for many of them. There remains a need to verify whether there is a statistical relationship between life events and participation in crime on the part of young adults in their twenties.

The first type of statistical analysis consists in relating each life event to the participation in crime. In this way, we can find out whether the proportion of subjects who had been criminally active after reaching adulthood vary in accordance with different life experiences. Table 3, in the section entitled "Participation in crime", presents the results. The value of Pearson's Chi Square statistic, as well as its significance, is also shown. The second section of Table 3, headed "Duration of criminal career", indicates the average duration of the criminal career for people who experienced or not the life events. The

value of the test of the difference in means and its significance are also presented.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE
(Tableau non disponible)

Family Life

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

The results of the bivariate analyses concerning the impact of family life on the participation in crime are not very indicative. For example, 76% of the subjects who had already lived with someone, married or not, were criminally active, compared with 71% of those who had never lived with a woman. Similarly, those who had a child were more often active than those who did not. On the other hand, these results are not statistically significant and should not be given too much attention. With regard to the duration of the criminal career, for those who had been criminally active at least once, the subjects who had lived with a woman and had a child showed slightly shorter criminal careers than the others. Again, these differences are not statistically significant.

The results of the bivariate analyses of the link between family life and participation in crime tend to reject the hypothesis that family life would curb criminal activity. It would be well, however, to wait for multivariate analyses to confirm this interpretation.

Occupational Life

According to Table 3, a person's occupation seems to have a role to play in the participation in crime on reaching adulthood. First of all, the subjects who had never worked were more apt to have taken part in criminal activities than the others. Next, those who had been on welfare (unemployment insurance, social welfare), and those who had lived on the proceeds of illegal activities were more often criminally active than the others. Finally, the former wards of the court who had

spent at least a year behind bars committed crimes of burglary, armed robbery, assault and battery or receiving stolen goods more often than the others. The statistics on the average duration of the criminal career confirm these results.

The results confirm the existence of a relationship between a person's main occupation over the course of a year and his propensity toward crime. The former wards of the Court who had kept a legitimate job for a year were less likely than the others to have been criminally active. Multivariate statistical analyses should make it possible to accept the possibility that there is a causal relationship between employment and criminal activity.

Use of Illicit Drugs

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

The factor most strongly associated with participation in crime is the use of illicit drugs. Drug users were much more likely to be criminally active during their twenties. For example, 94% of those who had used non-prescription medicines (amphetamines, speed, etc.) also said that they had participated in at least one crime, which is not the case for the 59% who had not used this type of drug. The average duration of their criminal activity was 9.8 years for the first group against 7.5 years for the second. It should be noted that these differences in prevalence and duration between the users and non-users varies according to the type of drug used.

The Age

The participation in crime diminishes as the person increases in age. There are two different explanations for this observation. The first, the situational explanation (Sampson and Laub, 1990) holds that offenders abandon their criminal activities because they have found other means of support (i.e. family, work, etc.). The second is based on a maturation model (Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1990), which specifies that participation in crime will diminish with age regardless of the person's marriage or work.

Table 4 presents the results of an a set of multiple regression analysis between age and life events and the participation in crime at each age. For the purposes of this analysis, each subject at each age is considered a unique case. With the exception of the variable "age of the subject", the independent variables of the model have all been dichotomized (0=absence of the trait, 1=presence of the trait). The dependent variable of the equation, the participation in crime, is also dichotomous. Although several regression postulates are violated in those equation models, the large number of cases (3009) stabilizes the calculation of the statistical results. Tests made with more sophisticated methods of analysis do not change the results obtained with the traditional multiple regression analysis.

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE
(Tableau non disponible)

According to the results shown in Table 4, age is inversely linked with participation in crime. There is an effect of maturation, whereby former wards of the Court give up their criminal career, which is independent of other life events. In general, life experiences such as marriage, procreation, work and dependence on welfare are not statistically associated with participation in crime as young adults. On the other hand, the use of drugs, hard or soft, is strongly linked with participation in crime between the ages of 18 to 31.

The results given so far show that the participation in crime diminishes with age regardless of other life events, thus giving weight to the theory of maturation. At the same time, drug consumption on the part of the subjects is a strong predictor of the criminal activity of the former wards of the Court. It is difficult to know whether this drug-taking has a causal effect on the participation in crime or whether these two vary due to an already established predisposition. On the other hand, the results do not establish a clear link between the life experiences relating to family life or occupation and the participation in crime. Before totally rejecting the situational explanation for the abandoning of the criminal career, it would be well to do an analysis taking into account the age at which the events took place. The impact

of the family and employment on crime can vary according to the age at which the subjects experienced them.

5.4 ANALYSIS ACCORDING TO AGE

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

Before coming to any conclusions as to the connection between life events and the abandonment of the criminal career, it is important to do a series of analyses that take the age factor into account. Our hypothesis is that age act as a determining factor between the elements of the model; in other words, the connection between life events and participation in crime will vary according to the age at which they occur.

Best suited to such analyses is the use of logistic regression. This technique makes it possible to decide on the relative importance of a group of independent variables (family, occupation and drug consumption) in explaining the dependent variable (the participation in crime at each age). Logistic regression should always be used instead of multiple regression when the dependent variable is dichotomous.

The results of the multivariate analyses presented concern the explanation of participation in crime at each age. This analytical strategy is far superior to that which examined the entire period under study (from 18 to 31) at one and the same time, in order to predict the number of years of participation in crime. In fact, a variable can have a different effect from one period to another. For example, the fact of smoking marijuana could very well be unrelated to crime among the subjects at 18, but could have a bearing on crime at age 31. In such a case, to smoke marijuana at 18 would be a "normal" social behavior, but would be a sign of a "pathology" at 31. This analytical approach seems better adapted to the changing nature of the relationship between life events and delinquent behavior throughout the different stages of a person's development.

Two models were tested for purposes of these analyses. The first includes only life experiences in connection with family and occupation. The second includes a selection of family and occupation life events -- the most significant -- and the consumption of the three most serious drugs. Considering the limited number of subjects, it was impossible to include all the variables under study within a single equation of logistic regression.

In addition to life events, two "control" variables were added to the equations. These are the "age of the subject at his first juvenile offense" and the "total number of juvenile offenses committed". The addition of these variables achieves two goals. Their quantitative nature adds stability to the regression model. Also, they afford assessments of the effect of individual predisposition of the subjects toward crime. Thus, the coefficients obtained for the model variables are not affected by differences in the subjects regarding their propensity to crime at the age of 18.

Table 5a shows the results of the logistic regression equations for the model, excluding drug consumption. An equation was made for each age. The dependent variable is the presence (1) or absence (0) of criminal activity at this age as reported by the subject. Almost all the regression equations are significant at .01. The column listing the number of events indicates the number of subjects criminally active at that age.

INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE
(Tableau non disponible)

The results observed for the two variables concerning the juvenile delinquency of the subjects warrant some discussion. First of all, the age at which the first offense took place is negatively linked with adult criminal activity, whereas the total number of juvenile crimes is positively linked with adult crime. The fact that the age at the first juvenile crime is negatively linked with participation in crime as an adult is explained by the fact that the total number of juvenile crimes is part of the regression model. Thus, if we take two subjects having accumulated the same number of juvenile crimes, the one who started earliest should be the least active in adulthood.

Two variables in the area of family life are contained in this first analysis model. First, cohabitation from the age of 18 to 23 is positively linked with participation in crime. On the other hand, after the age of 24, cohabitation is negatively associated with crime. Thus those young adults most inclined to participate in crime tend to live with a mate earlier than the others. Cohabitation, including marriage, tends to reduce criminal activity from the mid-twenties on. West (1982) found similar results among English criminals. Second, the results show that procreation is most often negatively associated with participation in crime. This relationship, however, is weak and non-significant.

Four occupational variables were considered: work, dependence, illicit employment and incarceration. Since the relationship between work and participation in crime is generally negative, it seems that employment acts as a brake on criminal activity. Subjects in a state of dependency, living on unemployment relief and social insurance, seem less inclined than the others to be criminally active. The fact of earning a living unlawfully (on the black market, work connected with the criminal milieu) and incarceration are both positively and significantly associated with the probability of participation in crime between the ages of 18 and 31. At this point, it would be unwise to interpret substantively the connection between incarceration and crime because of their rather muddled causal relationship.

Table 5b is composed of logistic regression equations explaining the participation in crime for the model, this time including the variables of drug consumption. The model includes the two variables measuring the level of juvenile delinquency, the most interesting variables of the preceding analyses, and the variables of drug consumption.

In this second series of equations, incidentally all significant and stronger than the first, the coefficients of the variables "age at first juvenile crime" and "total number of juvenile crimes" resemble those observed earlier. The coefficients for marriage and cohabitation are also similar to those presented above. On the other hand, the connection between work and participation in crime is stronger than that observed previously. When the habit of drug consumption is considered, the beneficial impact of lawful paid work emerges more clearly.

Within this series of regression equations, it is the variables of drug consumption that are the best predictors of participation in crime as an adult. Thus, men who have used hard drugs, chemicals and non-prescribed medicines are criminally active more often than those who never used these substances. The relationship between drugs and crime varies very little with age, so that the predictive ability of drug use is as good at 18, at 25 and at 31 years of age.

These analyses of participation in crime according to age revealed some important elements. First, both family life and work protect the adult from participation in crime. The effect of these factors were not very visible when the analyses examined the entire life period between the ages of 18 and 31. Where family life is concerned, marriage and cohabitation are associated with greater criminal activity from 18 to 23, but are a protection against crime after the age of 24. Finally, the use of illicit drugs is the best predictor of participation in crime at the adult stage. It is eminently possible that drug consumption retards the abandoning of an adult criminal career.

6. DISCUSSION

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

It must be remembered that this is an exploratory research and that the conclusions it draws warrant more in-depth study. This study has a number of limitations. First, the retrospective data furnished by the persons interviewed cannot be very precise. Next, the life events - conjugal life, work, drug consumption, etc. - could have been dealt with more detail than they were. Furthermore, it is uncertain that a sample of former wards of the juvenile Court are representative of all career criminals of adult age. Finally, statistic analyses seeking to understand the relationship between age, life events and participation in crime, become very complex and can confuse the effects existing between the variables present.

In spite of these methodological limitations, the principal results of the analysis deserve consideration. First of all, the conjugal life of the criminal affects his participation in crime. Cohabitation is positively associated with crime among very young adults (18-23 years old), whereas it act as a force for desistance after the age of 24. In England, West (1982) found that marriage had no effect among very young adults and a preventive effect among older adults. Our results, however, show a negative effect of marriage or cohabitation among very young adults. Cohabitation at 19 is a sign of impulsiveness and can lead to economic difficulties and family discord.

In the second place, it must be remembered that this study finds that lawful employment acts to deter adult participation in crime. This work/crime relationship is not strong, but emerges clearly when the analyses take the subjects' age into consideration. However, can we say why there is a connection between these two phenomena? Is it because work gives the youth greater self-esteem (Trasler, 1980)? Is it because work provides as good an income as crime (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986)? Or else, is it that youths less inclined toward crime are those who work most often, giving the impression of an association between work and crime (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990)? Our research cannot settle this debate.

Finally, the habit of using illicit drugs impedes the social adaptation of the former wards of the juvenile court. The consumption of hard drugs is still the best predictor of adult participation in crime, thus validating the prediction instruments that see drug consumption as a factor in recidivism (Greenwood, 1982). Our results show that when the subjects are comparable in terms of juvenile maladjustment (age at first offense and total number of juvenile crimes), family life and occupational live, those using illicit drugs are much more at risk of committing criminal acts than the others. This causal role of illicit drug consumption rejects the interpretation of the existence of a spurious relationship between drugs and crime.

Generally speaking, the decision to abandon a criminal career as an adult is due to a process of maturation and changes in his life situation. The quicker his entry into conventional society, whether marriage after the age of 23, legitimate work and giving up the use of

drugs, the quicker the criminal career will be abandoned. The impact of these life experiences is part of a process of maturation that will cause offenders to retire from criminal activity. Several factors can contribute to this "spontaneous" abandonment, whether the experience of punishment (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986), fear (West, 1978), or disappearance of partners, etc.

At present, too few studies have dealt with the abandoning of criminal careers to enable us to answer once and for all the numerous questions surrounding the factors involved. Several avenues have been opened up here, but they should be the subject of replication and more thorough studies. It is quite possible that the advancement of knowledge concerning the factors favoring the rejection of the criminal career help us find the best areas of intervention to favor in our treatment of adult criminals.

RÉFÉRENCES

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

Andrews, D. A., I. Zinger, R. D. Hoge, J. Bonta, P. Gendreau and F. T. Cullen. 1990. "Does correctional treatment work? A clinically-relevant and psychologically-informed meta-analysis." Criminology (28)3.

Bachman, J. G., P. M. O'Malley and J. Johnston. 1978. Youth in Transition: Adolescence to adulthood, Change and stability in the Lives of Young Men. Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research.

Blumstein A. and J. Cohen. 1982. The Duration of Adult Criminal Career. Rapport final. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Justice.

Blumstein, A., J. Cohen, J.A. Roth and C.A. Visher. 1986. Criminal Careers and "Career Criminals". Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Cusson, M. and P. Pinsonneault. 1986. "The decision to give up crime". In: D.K. Cornish and R.V. Clarke. The reasoning criminal. New York: Springer Verlag.

Elliott, D. S., S.D. Huizinga and S. Menard. 1989. Multiple Problem Youth: Delinquency, Substance Use and Mental Health Problems. New York: Springer Verlag.

Farrington, D. P. 1986. "Age and Crime". In: M. Tonry and N. Morris. Crime and Delinquency: An Annual Review of research. Volume 7. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Felson M., and L.E. Cohen. 1980. "Human ecology and crime: A routine activity approach". Human Ecology, (8)389-406.

Fréchette, M. and M. LeBlanc. 1987. Délinquances and délinquants. Chicoutimi: Gaétan Morin.

Good, D. H., M.A. Pirog-Good and R.C. Sickles. 1986. "An analysis of youth crime and employment patterns". Journal of quantitative criminology, (2)3.

Gottfredson M. and T. Hirschi. 1990. A General Theory of Crime. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Hirschi, T. 1969. Causes of Delinquency. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hirschi, T. and M. Gottfredson. 1983. "Age and the Explanation of Crime". American Journal of Sociology, (89)552-584.

Kempf, K.L. 1989. "Delinquency: Do the dropouts go back in?" Youth and society, (20)3.

LeBlanc, M. 1983. Boscoville, la rééducation évaluée. Montréal: Hurtubise HMH.

LeBlanc, M. and A. Caplan. 1990. Theoretical formalization, a Necessity: The example of Hirschi's Bonding Theory. University of Montreal: Research Group on Children's Maladjustment.

LeBlanc, M. and M. Fréchette. 1989. Male Criminal Activity from Childhood through Youth: Multilevel and Developmental Perspective. New York: Springer-Verlag.

LeBlanc, M. and R. Loeber. 1991. "Causality and the development of offending." In: D.F. Hale and A. Angold (Eds). Precursors, causes, and psychopathology. London: Wiley.

Leiter, J. 1992. A comparison of drug use and crime between former delinquents and the population. Mémoire de maîtrise, École de criminologie, Université de Montréal.

Lipsey, M. W. 1989. Juvenile delinquency treatment: A meta-analytic inquiry. New York: Russel Sage Foundation.

Loeber, R. and M. LeBlanc. 1990. "Toward a Developmental Criminology". In: M. Tonry and N. Morris. Crime and Justice: An Annual Review of Research. Volume 12. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Loeber, R. and M. Stouthamer-Loeber. 1987. "Prediction". In: H.C. Quay. Handbook of Juvenile Delinquency. New York: Wiley.

Mannheim, H. 1965. Comparative criminology. Volume 2. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.

Murray, C. A. and L.A. Cox, L.A. 1979. Beyond probation: Juvenile correction and the chronic delinquent. Beverley Hills: Sage.

Nurco, D. N., T.E. Hanlon, T.W. Kinlock and K.R. Duszynski. 1988. "Differential criminal patterns of narcotic addicts over an addiction career". Criminology, (26)3.

Quételet, A. 1831. Recherche sur le penchant au crime aux différents âges. Mémoire présenté à l'Académie des Sciences.

Rand, A. 1987. "Transitional Life Events and Desistance from Delinquency and Crime". In: M.E. Wolfgang, T.P. Thornberry, and R.M. Figlio. From Boy to Man, from Delinquency to Crime. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Sampson, R. and J. Laub. 1990. "Crime and deviance over the life course: The salience of adult social bonds". American Sociological Review, (5)609-627.

Thornberry, T.P. and R.L. Christenson. 1984. "Unemployment and criminal involvement: An investigation of reciprocal causal structures". American Sociological Review, (49)398-411.

Tonry, M. and J.Q. Wilson. 1991. "Drugs and Crime". Crime and Delinquency: An Annual Review of research. Volume 13. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Trasler, G. 1980. Aspects of Causality, Culture and Crime. Conférence, Centre international de recherche sociologique, pénale et pénitentiaire, Université de Messina.

West, D.J. 1982. Delinquency: Its Roots, Careers and Prospects. London: Heinemann.

Whitehead, J.T. and S.P. Lab. 1989. "A meta-analysis of juvenile correctional treatment". Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, (26)276-295.

Wilson, J. Q. and R. Herrnstein. 1985. Crime and Human Nature. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Fin du texte