Understanding delinquent development from childhood into early adulthood in early onset offenders

Hazebroek, B.C.M. van

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Author: Hazebroek, B.C.M. van
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Understanding delinquent development from childhood into early adulthood in early onset offenders

B.C.M. VAN HAZEBROEK

We know that most persistent offenders who cause considerable damage to society showed delinquent behavior in childhood. However, the long-term development of childhood arrestees is not well understood as longitudinal data are largely lacking. Do these high-risk children develop long-term offense patterns? Or are even the youngest children with a police contact capable of growing into law abiding adults? Or is it both? And, in case of the latter, which childhood arrestees stop showing delinquent behavior, and which children persist in crime into early adulthood? By providing insight into the long-term development of offending of childhood arrestees, and uncovering its explanatory factors, the current thesis improves our understanding of the delinquent development in this high-risk offender group.

The current thesis reveals that, in contrast to popular belief, childhood arrestees are not predestined to develop persistent delinquent behavior, as most children are not re-arrested between the age of 12 and 25. Recidivists display heterogeneity in their re-offense patterns, with only a small group of children developing into persistent offenders. Accounting for simultaneous risk exposure across life domains proved necessary to explain why childhood arrestees follow one trajectory over another. Problems in multiple life domains were found to predict persistent offense patterns.