Pathways into organized crime

van Koppen, M.V.

2013

document version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

citation for published version (APA)
van Koppen, M. V. (2013). *Pathways into organized crime: Criminal opportunities and adult-onset offending*.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1   Life courses of organized crime offenders

> No-one just decides when he is eighteen or nineteen years old;
> well, I'll engage in organized crime. It just doesn't happen like
> that... No-one chooses for a career in crime deliberately, that's im-
> possible.

This is what an inmate told us during an interview. He had been sentenced to
six years' imprisonment for his leading role in a criminal group involved in
drug trafficking. According to this inmate, being engaged in organized crime
was not the consequence of a deliberate decision. If he is right, how then do
individuals get involved in these activities? This thesis seeks to explain how
individuals become engaged in organized crime. At first sight, involvement in
organized crime may seem a more deliberate choice than many other crimes
as involvement in the former entails a much more extensive process than the
process preceding shoplifting or stealing a bicycle. Many high-volume crimes
can be committed by anyone, anywhere and at any time. Shoplifting does not
require a lot of specific knowledge, capacities or contacts. Organized crime,
however, differs from most common crimes in that their relative complexity
and the collaboration they require between offenders mean that most activities
involved in organized crime are not easily accessible.

Three common features mark the distinctive character of organized crime
activities.[1] Firstly, it is a long-term process that requires months of planning
and preparation time and consists of multiple activities scattered both tem-
porally and geographically. Each link within the process has to be covered
in advance; from financial investments to the production and transport of
goods, and from the falsification of documents to arrangements with sup-
pliers and buyers. The complexity and long-term nature of organized crime

---

[1]Following Fijnaut et al. (1998: 26-27), organized crime is defined as crime committed by groups
that *primarily focus on illegal profit, systematically commit crimes that adversely affect society, and are
capable of effectively shielding their activities, in particular by being willing to use physical violence or
eliminate individuals by way of corruption. The main source of information for this thesis, the Organized
Crime Monitor, uses a wide interpretation of shielding of activities*. It includes the threat and use of
violence, corruption, and also the use of cover businesses, code language, and misuse of certain
occupational groups, such as notaries, public lawyers and accountants (Kleemans et al., 1998).

activities are essentially different from most ordinary crimes, which are seen as requiring little in the way of effort, planning and preparation (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). The second and probably most differentiating characteristic of organized crime is the great importance of social relations (Block, 1994; Kleemans and Van de Bunt, 1999). The complexity of organized crime requires co-offenders from the start for individuals being able to engage in organized crime activities. Social ties also provide access to suppliers, customers and profitable criminal opportunities (McIllwain, 1999). Offenders need a group of others to cooperate with, but not any other offender will do, they need co-offenders with specific know-how or skills to execute the specific activities. A third common feature, and one which is particularly typical of Dutch organized crime, is the transnational character of many of these activities. Most organized crime in the Netherlands boils down to transit crime; with most organized crime groups engaging in international smuggling activities such as drug, human and arms trafficking. All three distinctive characteristics – long-term process, social ties and transnationality – enhance the complexity of activities in organized crime. The international character of Dutch organized crime reinforces the importance of knowledge and skills as well as the need for social contacts, as it involves transnational communications and familiarity with international transport and customs procedures.

Summing up, the threshold for organized crime is higher than for many other crimes. How does this relate to the way offenders get involved in this type of crime? Organized crime activities require endurance and close collaboration with others before they pay off. Involvement in these activities could possibly be expected, therefore, to be more the result of a deliberate process rather than an impulsive act. Extant criminological theories focus primarily on participation in general crimes. Yet given the differences between organized crime and most general crimes, the extent to which these theories hold true for organized crime is unclear. This thesis seeks to provide insight into the life course of organized crime offenders and to expand knowledge on individuals who become involved in a criminal group at a particular moment in their lives.

The main aim in studying organized crime offenders and their criminal life courses is to understand how they become involved in organized illegal activities and eventually also to prevent others from following the same path. Although organized crime offenders represent only a small number of the total offender population, they are responsible for substantial amounts of harm; organized crime involves large sums of money and causes considerable damage to society. In Europe alone, billions of euros of taxes revenues are lost through smuggling and organized fraud (Europol, 2011). Not to mention the direct personal harm caused by human traffickers exploiting people. Violence is also commonplace in organized crime groups in the case, for instance, of difficul-

ties relating to payments or deliveries (Kruisbergen et al., 2012: 293). Although many organized crime activities are relatively invisible, prison sentences imposed on offenders are relatively high. Given the level of harm caused to society by organized crime, many European criminal codes, including that of the Netherlands, have relatively high maximum penalties for crimes such as drug trafficking or human smuggling. The Netherlands was recently identified as one of the European hubs at which criminal logistics concentrate and new crime opportunities are created (Europol, 2011). Fighting organized crime therefore remains high on the Dutch criminal justice agenda. The fight against this form of crime will benefit from increased knowledge on offenders, their criminal pathways and their involvement mechanisms.

We still know very little about organized crime offenders, their criminal careers, and how they get involved in criminal groups. Received knowledge on criminal careers and extant criminological theories are based on information from relatively general offender samples, of which organized crime offenders constitute only a very small part.[2] The most severe offenders are also the rarest (DeLisi, 2006), thus leaving organized crime offenders and other specific offender groups underexposed in common criminal career research. Organized crime differs substantially from many high-volume crimes in its complexity and accessibility, leading to the hypothesis that organized crime offenders may differ from high-volume crime offenders in ways that translate into differences in their criminal careers and in how they become involved in such activities. At first glance, organized crime does not fit the general description of crime as short-sighted acts providing immediate gratification. As a result, individuals participating in these activities may show different characteristics than offenders committing high-volume crimes. Many fraud-related activities, for example, are hardly possible to commit without specific knowledge or education. Social ties providing access to co-offenders, suppliers and buyers will most probably come with age, especially those that cross borders. Given these differences, the extent to which received knowledge and accepted criminological theories hold true for offenders involved in organized crime at specific moments in their lives is unclear.

This thesis unites two fields within criminology that are usually far apart. Contemporary life-course criminology is often quantitative in nature and focuses on the individual offender; criminals serve as the point of departure in examining criminal careers and aspects affecting them. In contrast to this rather individualistic approach, organized crime research is mainly qualitative of nature and primarily focuses on the nature and dynamics of criminal groups and networks, thereby neglecting the individuals who together form the criminal organization. Developmental theories of crime will benefit from

---

[2]For exceptions - predominantly qualitative case studies - see for example Firestone (1993) and Morselli (2005).

research focusing on individuals within a group and combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques (see, for example, Laub and Sampson, 2003; Sampson and Laub, 1993: 251-253). Organized crime theories will benefit from a more systematic exploration of the lives of offenders involved in these activities. This study aims to relate these different approaches and focuses on the criminal careers of individual offenders, as well as on their activities in organized crime and their contribution to criminal groups.

This thesis therefore employs a multi-method approach, including both quantitative and qualitative data sources and research methods. Firstly, we used a large dataset containing information on over 1,600 offenders, all of whom were involved in organized crime in the Netherlands between 1994 and 2006. Secondly, we studied detailed information on organized crime offenders in police investigation files, while thirdly we conducted in-depth interviews with sixteen inmates convicted for participation in organized crime. A large sample of the general Dutch offender population was used for comparative purposes. Section 1.6 elaborates on this multi-method approach and the data sources used.

The main focus of the thesis is on providing insight into criminal life courses of organized crime offenders and to explain how and why individuals engage in organized crime. In answering these questions, the thesis starts with a detailed analysis of the criminal careers of a large sample of organized crime offenders (chapter 2). Secondly, it examines how the criminal histories of organized crime offenders relate to mainstream criminal histories (chapter 3). Criminal pathways of organized crime offenders are compared to pathways in a sample representative for the general offender population. Thirdly, processes and mechanisms of involvement in organized crime are explored, based on police files on criminal investigations into criminal groups (chapter 4). Finally, in-depth interviews with a sample of convicted organized crime offenders are discussed to gain insight into their life courses and explain their involvement in organized crime (chapter 5).

This introductory chapter elaborates upon theoretical and empirical notions from both life-course criminology and organized crime research (sections 1.2 and 1.3), followed by an account of what is known of organized crime offenders' life courses (section 1.4). The research questions underlying the thesis are introduced (section 1.5) and data sources used to answer these questions are explored (section 1.6). The final section (section 1.7) provides an outline of the thesis.

1.2   Developmental and life-course criminology

A multitude of studies has been carried out on crime causation and subsequent criminal careers. Core findings of these studies are nowadays consid-

ered accepted conclusions (Farrington, 2003). Most of these studies, however, focus on common crimes and offenders committing these common crimes. It is still unclear whether or to what extent these common truths, and theories based on these truths, also apply to more specific offender groups such as organized crime offenders.

One of the widely accepted conclusions in life-course criminology describes the relationship between age and crime, with crime peaking in early adolescence and declining through adulthood. Although the shape of the age-crime curve is commonly accepted, little agreement exists on the interpretation of this relationship. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1986) claim that the age-crime relationship is the same for all offenders, regardless of race, place, time and type of offence. Growing numbers of scholars, however, argue that the age-crime curve reflects variation among offenders (see, for example, Blumstein et al., 1988). Moffitt (1993) proposed two distinct groups of offenders, whose specific criminal careers together constitute the shape of the age-crime curve. One group – adolescence-limited offenders – is responsible for the high peak during adolescent years. These offenders start offending in early adolescence and continue offending at a high rate until they enter adulthood: a sharp decline is then seen. The second group – life-course-persistent offenders – causes the tails at both ends of the curve. These offenders start at an early age and continue offending at a low rate far into adulthood. While life-course-persistent offending is explained by personality deficits and early risk factors, adolescence-limited offending is thought to be motivated by a gap between biological age and social age and the mimicking of delinquent peers. Although life-course-persistent offenders are estimated to comprise only a small fraction of the total offender population, this is a recognized and often repeated finding in criminological research (for a review, see Moffitt, 2006).

Since Moffitt introduced her taxonomy of two separate careers of offenders, other scholars have also identified multiple groups of offenders with distinct criminal pathways (for a review, see Piquero, 2008). In general, these pathways and explanations behind these pathways emerge from the following rules: (1) an early onset foretells a long career in crime; the earlier people engage in deviant behaviour, the more likely they are to continue offending for a longer period (see, for example, Blumstein et al., 1986: 86-88; Krohn et al., 2001; Moffitt and Caspi, 2001) and (2) the earlier the onset, the more serious a delinquent's behaviour will be in terms of frequency and persistence (see, for example, Farrington, 1983; Cohen, 1986; Wikström, 1987).

Kleemans and De Poot (2008) recently questioned whether traditional criminal career research findings also reflected the criminal paths of a highly specific group such as organized crime offenders. While recognizing the strengths of criminal career research, they also drew attention to the limited scope of most of these studies that is caused by their focus on high-volume

crime, young offenders and individual offender characteristics. Analyses conducted by Kleemans and De Poot show that older offenders are overrepresented in organized crime and that a large majority of them are adult onset offenders. Criminal pathways showing adult onset were rarely ever distinguished until recently and have only been getting attention lately in life-course criminology.

1.2.1 Explanations for criminal pathways

The need for a more in-depth explanation of these criminal pathways was driven by the abundance of findings on criminal careers. One perspective within life-course theories emphasized within-individual stability over the life course. Static theories depart from the idea that criminal propensity differs between people and is determined by biological or early-life risk factors. Static theories are endorsed by a wide range of research studying the relationship between prenatal or early childhood risk factors, such as drinking of alcohol by the mother during early pregnancy or early aggression, and later criminal behaviour (Piquero et al., 2002; Jacobson and Jacobson, 1994). An important question in this respect is the extent to which these risk factors influence outcomes during later stages of life. Little is known about the effects of these risk factors later in life because studies do not usually capture individuals after the ages of 30 or 40.

The most prominent static theory in criminology is the general theory of crime, stating that low self-control as a stable personality characteristic accounts for criminal behaviour throughout the life course (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). According to Gottfredson and Hirschi, all criminal behaviour can be regarded as manifestations of a single underlying trait – low self-control – and thus they also deny the existence of different types of offenders committing different types of crime. Concepts such as white-collar crime and organized crime are incompatible with their view because, as they see it, there is only one type of offender, who is in principle capable of committing all types of crime. Hence no separate theories are needed. While Gottfredson and Hirschi acknowledge that some offenders will work together for certain periods of time, these collaborations are believed often to be just accidental contacts. In their view, therefore, the organizational aspects of organized crime, and the social skills believed to be needed, are just an illusion (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990: 213). This general theory of crime does not allow for adult-onset offending as Gottfredson and Hirschi argue that the age-crime curve is equal for all offenders.

Static theories are challenged by studies indicating instability over the life course and differences between offenders. It has been suggested, for example, that early experiences may become less influential as an individual becomes

older (see, for example, Viken et al., 1994). Large family size, being raised by a single parent and low IQ scores are all related to criminal behaviour in adolescence, but do not account for criminal behaviour in adulthood (Laub et al., 1998). Dynamic crime theories allow for such instability over the life course and assume that all kinds of changes during life can affect criminal behaviour. A well-known theory is the age-graded theory of informal social control, which explains changes in criminal propensity over time (Sampson and Laub, 1993). Turning points in life that bring about changes in an individual's bonds with society can result in changes in crime. It is argued that acquiring a stable job, for example, inhibits criminal behaviour (Laub and Sampson, 2003). Having a job brings along changes in everyday routines and a stronger bond to society. Individuals with a job are thought to have less time and opportunity to commit crimes and less time to spend with their delinquent friends. Getting married and becoming a parent have similar effects on crime (Sampson and Laub, 1990, 1993). While these assets of life are likely to inhibit criminal behaviour, other transitions in life will tip the balance towards crime. Individuals who become separated from society as a result, for example, of losing their job are more likely to become involved in criminal behaviour (Farrington and West, 1995; Sampson and Laub, 1990, 1993).

1.2.2 Different offenders and different careers

As early as 1940, Sutherland noted the importance of recognizing different kinds of crime, especially crimes other than common street crime. Offenders and offences in organized crime may shine a different light on almost all the topics discussed in the previous sections. The major reason for separately studying offenders involved in organized crime is that the nature of organized crime differs from high-volume crime in ways that may translate into differences between criminal pathways and involvement mechanisms. Farrington (2003), for example, listed ten widely accepted conclusions on crime over the life course. However, even given the relatively small amount of research into criminal careers of organized crime offenders conducted to date (see Kleemans and De Poot, 2008), some of these conclusions would not seem to hold true for offenders who engage in organized crime at a particular moment in their lives. One of the conclusions, for example, formulated by Farrington states that "most offenses up to the late teenage years are committed with others, whereas most offenses from age 20 onwards are committed alone". Offenders in organized crime, however, do not commit their criminal activities in isolation as they grow older since these activities are, by definition, committed with others and are rarely committed before the age of 20. One of the other premises states that "the peak age of onset of offending is between age 8 and 14". However, offenders who engage in organized crime at a partic-

ular moment in their criminal career have been found also to deviate from this common developmental path as significant numbers of them do not engage in any form of crime before the age of 20 (Kleemans and De Poot, 2008).

At the basis of common beliefs about criminal careers such as those formulated by Farrington, are large-scale longitudinal studies. Most of these studies rely on random samples of the population, such as general population samples (the Pittsburgh Youth Study conducted by Loeber et al., 1991, for instance), birth cohort samples (such as the 1945 and 1958 Philadelphia Birth Cohort Study conducted by Tracy et al., 1990, or the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development conducted by West and Farrington, 1973), or delinquent samples (for example, the Gluecks' Study conducted by Glueck and Glueck, 1950, or the Criminal Career and Life-course Study conducted by Blokland and Nieuwbeerta, 2005). These samples mainly represent common crimes and for two reasons fail to capture patterns in less common crimes such as organized crime. Firstly, variation within these samples is limited due to the tendency to focus on high-volume crimes and the neglect of more specific types of crime, such as organized crime. Secondly, research on criminal careers is primarily concerned with offending during childhood and adolescence and most samples only have information available on this early age frame, thus making it impossible to identify older offenders.

1.2.3   Adult-onset offending

Whereas processes causing someone to offend during adolescence have been well studied (in, for example, Farrington et al., 1990), extant studies shed insufficient light on adult-onset offending, either theoretically or empirically. The neglect of adult-onset offending can be attributed to multiple causes. Firstly, the static point of view that criminal behaviour, especially more serious forms, emerges early in life means there is no need to focus on adult onset. This idea is confirmed by the age-crime curve indicating a bulk of crime between the approximate ages of 12 and 20, followed by a rapid decline. It is unclear, however, as to what extent ecological fallacy, i.e. conclusions on individual behaviour derived from aggregated patterns, may influence this point of view.[3] Secondly, the focus on young offenders and early crime onset is justified by the idea that future career criminals should be identified at the earliest

---

[3]Following Fijnaut et al. (1998: 26-27), organized crime is defined as crime committed by groups that *primarily focus on illegal profit, systematically commit crimes that adversely affect society, and are capable of effectively shielding their activities, in particular by being willing to use physical violence or eliminate individuals by way of corruption*. The main source of information for this thesis, the Organized Crime Monitor, uses a wide interpretation of *shielding of activities*. It includes the threat and use of violence, corruption, and also the use of cover businesses, code language, and misuse of certain occupational groups, such as notaries, public lawyers and accountants (Kleemans et al., 1998).

possible point in their lives. It is often argued that the onset of offending takes place early in life and that adult offending requires early anti-social behaviour. As a logical consequence, the focus of research is on this early behaviour as a risk factor for criminal involvement (see, for example, Moffitt and Caspi, 2001; Robins, 1978). Most empirical longitudinal studies focus on a relatively early and short age-period and are therefore unable to identify phenomena other than early onset of criminal behaviour. Piquero (2008) gives an overview of all research using trajectory methodology in studying criminal activity over the life course between 1993 and 2006. These ninety studies cover some fifty different samples, only half of which include individuals over the age of 18 and only a fifth of which have data available on individuals after the of age 30. Thirdly, even when some individuals within a studied sample of offenders are found to have an adult onset, they are frequently ignored or brushed aside from a theoretical perspective. As a result, onset in the early years of life is well studied and much better understood than adult onset.

Scholars have recently, however, started paying particular attention to offenders who start their criminal career after the age of 18, or even much later.[4] Studies that have data available to identify adult onset, show that approximately half of adult offenders experienced adult onset (Blumstein et al., 1986; Farrington, 1983; McCord, 1980; Polk et al., 1981; Tracy and Kempf-Leonard, 1996). Moreover, the small numbers of birth cohort studies of common offenders that follow individuals into adulthood systematically identify large numbers of adult-onset offenders. Between one quarter and one half of the criminal samples of cohorts in, for instance, Racine, Stockholm and Philadelphia turn out to have started offending in adulthood (see, for example, Carrington et al., 2005; Eggleston and Laub, 2002; Gomez-Smith and Piquero, 2005; Kratzer and Hodgins, 1999; Stattin et al., 1989).

Findings on the substantial number of adult-onset offenders contradict the classical age-crime curve, which indicates high numbers of offences during adolescent years and a rapid decline afterwards. While the peak of the age-crime curve is said to be due to the many adolescents temporarily engaging in crime, its flaring is explained by the small group of persistent offenders that start their criminal career early and carry on offending far into adulthood (see, for example, Moffitt, 1993). However, this common explanation tends to overlook the many offenders starting their criminal career only after they have reached adulthood. Although adult offenders seem to offend with a lower frequency, they constitute a large share of the total number of offenders. Moreover, offences committed by adult-onset offenders are far more serious

---

[4]It should be noted that most studies use the concept of late onset to describe offenders who start showing delinquent behaviour late in adolescence. Often, individuals engaging in crime at the ages of 12 to 15 are considered to have a late onset (see, for example, Moffitt, 1993; Nagin and Farrington, 1992; Patterson and Yoerger, 1997; Simons et al., 1994).

than offences committed by juvenile and persistent offenders (Wolfgang et al., 1987). Finally, adult-onset offenders are responsible for a relatively large share of violent offences, compared to adolescence-limited offenders (Kratzer and Hodgins, 1999).

Some will argue that adult onset is an artefact and caused by a detection effect (McGee and Farrington, 2010). Individuals first registered for crime as adults may also have committed offences at an earlier age. The use of self-reported crime rates may lower the onset age of criminal behaviour and, therefore, the extent of adult onset. Some offenders who are first convicted as adults will also have committed juvenile delinquency that remained undetected. Although adult onset is probably overestimated due to the use of official data,[5] it seems unlikely that the large numbers of adult-onset offenders can be totally explained or nullified by shortcomings in official data.

Those theories that take adult onset seriously seek to explain the phenomenon in theories of social control (McGee and Farrington, 2010). Weakened bonds and changes in social ties, such as family break-ups or unemployment, can affect criminal motivation and cause an adult onset of criminal behaviour (Elander et al., 2000; Laub and Sampson, 2003). While life transitions are commonly used to explain desistance from crime (Sampson and Laub, 2003), life events can also result in a turn for the worse and amplify crime. Individuals with a protected childhood, for example, lose some of their strong social bonds when they enter adulthood, have to take care of themselves, and are no longer protected by their family (Thornberry and Krohn, 2005). Negative life events such as marital separation, alcohol abuse, unemployment and changes in social relationships are also found to predict future offending (Farrington et al., 1986; Farrington and West, 1995).

Several studies have compared the effects of crime predictor variables on adult-onset offenders and other groups, such as early starters or adolescence-limited offenders, to examine whether explanations for early-onset offending differ from explanations for adult-onset offending.[6] The bulk of these studies conclude that most if not all predictor variables have equal effects for adult-onset offenders and other groups of offenders. Adult-onset offenders and persistent offenders (i.e. individuals offending in both adolescence and adulthood) do not differ in terms of school success, family support (Polk et al., 1981), job stability, marriage, income, and commitment to conventional goals (Sampson and Laub, 1990). The only significant difference found was for

---

[5]Additionally, adult onset is also underestimated in most of the samples that identify adult-onset offenders in the first place since the follow-up often stops after the first few years of adulthood, i.e. at ages between 22 and 30. Individuals are obviously able to start offending at any time in their life, and most studies do not take account of someone who is first arrested at the age of 35. The extent of adult onset will rise if individuals are followed up to older ages.

[6]These studies define adult-onset offenders as those committing a first crime at or after the age of 18.

negative peer involvement, where persistent offenders showed higher levels (Polk et al., 1981). Logistic regressions carried out to predict juvenile-limited, persistent, and adult-onset offending in two Racine birth cohorts found that all but one background characteristics had similar effects on offending across the three groups (Eggleston and Laub, 2002). The only interaction effect – indicating a significantly different effect for the different offender groups – was found for the time a person had been employed since secondary school. Having more continual employment increases the probability of adult offending for late-onset offenders, but not for persistent offenders.[7] The authors were not able, however, to provide an explanation for this finding.

In conclusion, findings on adult-onset offenders are ambiguous. On the one hand, a vast share of adult-onset offenders is systematically identified in various samples. On the other hand, however, studies concentrating on adult-onset offenders as a separate group indicate that this type of offending can be explained by the same factors as early-onset and persistent offending, thus implying that a focus on adult-onset offending and involvement mechanisms is superfluous. Research to date, however, has focused specifically on juveniles and adolescents, particularly those committing relatively common types of crime. It has often, therefore, related to processes and life domains prior to adulthood, whereas other predictor variables, taken from adult life domains, may be better suited. Furthermore, these empirical studies have all focused on offenders committing less serious offences and were based on quantitative data that did not take account of unregistered offending (for example, Eggleston and Laub, 2002; Polk et al., 1981). Further examination is needed to unravel the mechanisms that drive adult individuals without a history of juvenile offending to become involved in crime (see also DeLisi and Piquero, 2011). Did they have a suppressed criminal propensity from an early age? Did they develop a criminal intention over the years, or did they become criminally active in response to a specific situation? A better understanding of the mechanisms and processes that cause adult-onset crime will contribute to the current knowledge on causations and manifestations of crime.

1.3   Manifestations of organized crime in the Netherlands

1.3.1   IRT affair

The emergence of a strong tradition in organized crime research in the Netherlands was fuelled by a political scandal in the late 1980s when interregional investigation teams (Dutch acronym: IRTs) comprising representatives from

---

[7]It should be noted however, that Eggleston and Laub (2002) conduct a series of twenty logistic regressions (with a significance level of .05), though do not control for an experiment-wise error rate.

several police forces were set up to work together in the fight against organized crime. These IRTs had not been expected to trigger a new impulse for scientific research into organized crime. One of these IRTs, involving collaboration between the Amsterdam, Utrecht and Haarlem police forces, used a questionable investigation method in its fight against a particular criminal group. The team approached known criminals with contacts within this criminal group and persuaded them to work as police informers. In the meantime, these informers were allowed to continue criminal activities and to cooperate with criminals from the target group. They were allowed, for example, to import large quantities of drugs and to sell them, under police supervision, to criminals from the target group as this would help the police to gather valuable information. It later turned out that many of these drugs were never retrieved. This method of controlled delivery of drugs was felt to go against the grain with those who thought such investigation methods were unacceptable. The IRT in question was consequently disbanded, causing a great deal of distress among police forces. The IRT affair became a fait accompli (see for an overview, see Van de Bunt, 2004).

In an unsuccessful attempt to ease the commotion caused by the affair, a committee of experts led by Wierenga was appointed. This was followed by a fact-finding committee led by a Member of Parliament, Van Traa. Finally, a parliamentary committee of inquiry, also led by Van Traa, was set up to examine police investigation methods used in the Netherlands. One of the committee's conclusions was that a proper description of Dutch organized crime was lacking, and that this was needed in order to discuss criminal investigation methods targeting this phenomenon (PEO, 1996). An external research group chaired by Professor Fijnaut was consequently appointed to study the nature, scale and seriousness of organized crime in the Netherlands. The research group's final report concluded that few systematic empirical studies of Dutch organized crime had previously been conducted (Fijnaut et al., 1998). Methods and standards to study the phenomenon were consequently also lacking. The group's first task, therefore, was to determine a univocal definition of organized crime suitable for the Dutch situation. This stated that organized crime groups *primarily focus on illegal profit, systematically commit crimes that adversely affect society, and are capable of effectively shielding their activities, in particular by being willing to use physical violence or eliminate individuals by way of corruption* (Fijnaut et al., 1998: 26-27). This definition of organized crime is adopted in the current study.[8]

---

[8]Many definitions of organized crime circulate worldwide, addressing or highlighting various dimensions of the problem (see, for example, Finckenauer, 2005; Hagan, 2006; Paoli, 2002). Since the report of the research group was published in 1998, this Fijnaut definition of organized crime has been predominant in the Netherlands. For this reason and the more pragmatic reason that the main data used for this thesis was gathered using the Fijnaut definition, the definition is adopted in this thesis.

1.3.2 The Organized Crime Monitor and study of Dutch organized crime

As a result of the report published by the Fijnaut research group, the then Minister of Justice promised to report recurrently to the Dutch parliament on the situation of organized crime in the Netherlands in the form of the Organized Crime Monitor (OCM). Now, almost fifteen years later, the OCM is the most systematic longitudinal study on organized crime in the Netherlands – and possibly also worldwide – and is still ongoing. Three sweeps of the OCM have been published since 1999, all covering analyses of forty police investigations on criminal groups in the Netherlands, and a fourth sweep was published recently (Kleemans et al., 1998; Kleemans et al., 2002; Kruisbergen et al., 2012; Van de Bunt and Kleemans, 2007; for an overview in English, see Kleemans, 2007). In each sweep, police files of the 40 selected crime groups were systematically analysed, while experts such as police investigators and public prosecutors were also interviewed in order to obtain as much information as possible on the current state of organized crime in the Netherlands.

The first three OCM reports replaced the image of criminal groups as hierarchically structured organizations by a more subtle depiction. Instead of having a pyramidal organization structure with a strict division of tasks, criminal groups in the Netherlands take the shape of networks in which cooperation takes place in more flexible structures. The rejection of crime groups as pyramidal structures has implications for individual involvement as individuals do not necessarily have to start at the bottom of a hierarchy and rise to higher positions. Instead, the flexible structures of crime groups allow for other ways of engaging in organized crime. Organized crime is multifaceted as it represents a broad range of criminal activities. However, ever since it entered the Dutch research agenda, it has predominantly manifested itself in the production and trafficking of drugs. As with legal businesses, organized crime obeys the economic laws of supply and demand (Van Duyne, 1996). In other words, criminal groups and offenders have to be able to survive financially in an illegal market such as the illicit drug market. Crime groups, however, also follow a rule additional to the normal economic rules as they have to search for a way to minimize the risks inherent in their activities by responding to police priorities. Dutch organized crime has evolved over the years in response to these economic rules. Whereas mobile and highly organized gang dominated criminal group activities in the 17th and 18st centuries, more recent periods have seen drug-related activities dominating Dutch transit crime. The Netherlands has a long tradition of large-scale hashish transports, followed by heroin trafficking, and a rising position in the production of synthetic drugs. Other illegal markets, such as those involving human trafficking and weapon smuggling, have also developed over the years, but have always been smaller in size (see, for example, Van Duyne, 1996).

Criminal groups in the Netherlands do not have control over legal industries or governmental bodies, as is the case in Italy and the United States (Jacobs and Peters, 2003; Paoli, 2003). In fact, organized crime has been shown to be a heterogeneous phenomenon manifesting itself differently in each country, as evidenced by the Italian Cosa Nostra, British crime firms, American cartels, Colombian cocaine rings and Chinese triads (see, for example, Paoli, 2002, 2004). Dutch organized crime is characterized by its transnational nature and is therefore often referred to as *transit crime* (Kleemans, 2007). Many activities of criminal groups cross the borders of the Netherlands: drug trafficking, smuggling of illegal immigrants, human trafficking for sexual exploitation, arms trafficking, trafficking in stolen vehicles, money laundering and tax evasion. These international activities are facilitated by the country's geographically favourable position on the coast, while its old colonial ties with countries such as Surinam and the former Netherlands Antilles mean it is a logistic junction in Europe for trafficking purposes.

Irrespective of the differences within and between organized crime groups, all these groups are made up of individuals with varying responsibilities. These varying responsibilities also require different knowledge and skills. In most groups covered by the OCM, two or more individuals play a leading role. These individuals outline the plans, make the most important decisions and give orders to co-offenders. Others are responsible for coordinating and managing more concrete activities, including staying in contact with the lower-level responsible for performing these concrete activities. The lower-level offenders in turn are deployed in activities such as the actual transport of illegal goods. Most offenders within a crime group have one of these three roles, while others, such as facilitators responsible for specific technical or logistic processes, are more loosely involved in a criminal group (Van de Bunt and Kleemans, 2007).

1.4   Criminal careers of organized crime offenders

Dutch organized crime has been studied extensively since first appearing on the research agenda in the wake of the IRT affair. These studies have provided us with knowledge on the manifestations of organized crime structures and the routines of criminal groups. These same studies, however, underexpose the personal characteristics of offenders and how they become involved in these organized crime activities. The most valuable information on individuals operating these illegal activities is from international memoirs (see Bowden, 2001; Cromwell and Birzer, 2012; Iorizzo, 2003; Maas, 1997; Mustain and Capeci, 2002; Powell, 2000; Steffensmeier and Ulmer, 2005). Morselli (2001, 2005), for example, extensively describes the career of Howard Marks, an international drug smuggler. Based largely on information extracted from

Marks' autobiography entitled *Mr. Nice* (Marks, 1998), Morselli focuses on the personal network that enabled Marks to be successful in the cannabis trade for twenty years and emphasizes that a brokerage position in a network has advantages over a more authoritarian role in a hierarchical organization. Individuals bridging a gap between two others – or between a criminal group and an individual – who would otherwise have remained unconnected have a more favourable position than those who are part of a tightly connected structure. Morselli also studied the 25-year career of Salvatore Gravano, an *underboss* in a Cosa Nostra cell (Morselli, 2003). In both the studies of *Mr. Nice* and Gravano, Morselli focuses on network aspects and the success factors in these individuals' criminal careers, i.e. the number of (non-redundant) contacts and social network dynamics.

While studies on memoirs such as those conducted by Morselli have their main focus on opportunity structures and networks in their attempt to construct an image of organized crime and its offenders, Bovenkerk (2000) takes a wider view on the personality of offenders operating in a crime group. He argues that characteristics favouring a leading position in the legitimate sector also predict involvement in organized crime. The difference between individuals involved in legitimate businesses and those involved in criminal business, according to Bovenkerk, is that organized crime offenders are not motivated by a belief in the product they are selling, but instead by their out-law business being very profitable – and more profitable than legal business. Based on the five-factor model commonly used in psychological testing, Bovenkerk formulates a job description for a Mafia boss; he (or she) has to be highly extrovert, conscientious to a certain extent, not agreeable, and to have low altruism and *controlled impulsiveness*.

Firestone (1993) extensively studied Mafia memoirs and expounds several theories explaining involvement. He concludes that cultural deviance (or differential association) theory offers the best explanation of why individuals become involved in organized crime; most of the biographical and autobiographical literature from mobsters indicates that a lack of other opportunities is not the reason why they engaged in crime. Instead they were raised in an environment in which involvement in crime was seen as a normal path to follow. Firestone thoughtfully rejects two other theories explaining why individuals become Mafiosi. Firstly the strain theory, which explains crime as a substitute path to success for those denying the opportunity to obtain this success through legitimate means (Merton, 1968). Firestone found that most autobiographies stated that their authors simply preferred to be criminals rather than having conventional careers, even if they could have had legitimate means. Secondly the control theory, which argues that a lack of social bonds to society results in criminal behaviour (Hirschi, 1971). Most of the autobiographical authors were found to have had decent childhoods.

Biographies such as *Mr. Nice* and other studies based on memoirs sketch a good picture of individual engagement in a criminal organization. Narratives illustrate the complexity of a life course in crime, including contacts, situational context and processes such as persistence and desistance. They also provide a better understanding of life histories and the individuals in question. Although these sources of information are useful, and life histories are very informative, they shed light on only a limited group of offenders. One may wonder whether this impression reflects of the average offender in organized crime, or instead gives a more portrayal representation. Logically, the more interesting, talkative and probably atypical offenders, with long and fascinating careers in organized crime, are selected to be described qualitatively. Bovenkerk (2000), for example, theorizes on personality characteristics of offenders with a leading position, who form only the minority of offenders even within organized crime. More systematic research is necessarily needed in order to obtain a true impression of a general career in or verging on organized crime, and the diversity of this.

1.4.1 Life courses of white-collar offenders

Criminal careers in organized crime have rarely been investigated quantitatively, although some studies have examined careers in white-collar crime. Although white-collar crime differs from organized crime, both represent more uncommon types of crime committed by distinct groups of offenders.[9] Recent quantitative studies on white-collar crime have challenged existing views on criminal careers. For this reason, some findings of research into white-collar crime are discussed ahead of organized crime.

Until 1980, most of what was known about white-collar offenders and their crimes was extracted from case studies on those from high social classes. The absence of early criminal career research into white-collar crime follows from the assumption that white-collar criminals are one-shot offenders. With the transition to an offence-based definition, datasets of white-collar crimes committed in the United States started being constructed from 1980 on (Leeper Piquero and Benson, 2004). These new efforts immediately disproved the most commonly held belief on white-collar offenders: In other words, they are not all one-time offenders (see, for example, Wheeler et al., 1988a; Edelhertz and Overcast, 1982). Almost half of white-collar offenders have had at least one other official contact with the criminal justice system (Benson and Moore,

---

[9]As in organized crime, various definitions of white-collar crime are in use. White-collar crime used to be defined based on the social standing of those committing the crime (Sutherland, 1949), though the focus shifted to an offence-based defintion, including crimes such as bank embezzlement, bribery and income tax violations (Weisburd et al., 1990; Weisburd and Waring, 2001). To a certain extent, overlap exists between organized crime and white-collar crime, particularly in fraud cases.

1992; Weisburd and Waring, 2001; Weisburd et al., 1991). They have also been found to differ substantially in several aspects of the criminal career from the often studied offenders of high-volume crime. White-collar offenders are older at their age of onset, even if only white-collar offenders with previous records are included (Benson and Kerley, 2000; Weisburd and Waring, 2001). White-collar offenders committing multiple offences are also criminally active for longer periods than high-volume offenders. During their career, however, the commit fewer crimes (Weisburd and Waring, 2001).

Leeper Piquero and Benson (2004) noted in respect of careers in white-collar crime that *the typical white-collar offender greatly differs from the typical street offender and does not appear to fit into the proposed explanations of life course offending patterns*. Based on their findings, Leeper Piquero and Benson propose a career pattern (*punctuated situationally dependent offending*) that assumes white-collar criminals to be criminally active during adolescence (just like common offenders) committing high-volume crimes, to desist for a while and then to begin offending again when they reach their thirties or forties. These offences later in life are typically white-collar crimes. External factors, such as a personal or occupational crisis in the offender's life, are used to explain this revival later in life. The second explanation of this revival concerns the opportunities that become available when an individual reaches a certain occupational status. These findings tie in with Weisburd and Waring (2001), who argue that situational context is a key concept in explaining a large proportion of involvement in white-collar crime. Many white-collar crime offenders are not predisposed to becoming criminally active. Opportunities and situations are relatively more important than characteristics of the criminals themselves in explaining involvement in white-collar crimes.

1.4.2 Prior study of criminal life courses of organized crime offenders

The study at hand follows from a study conducted by Kleemans and De Poot (2008) that found substantial differences between the developmental paths of organized crime offenders and those of offenders involved in high-volume crime. The authors studied the criminal careers of around one thousand offenders involved in eighty criminal groups included in the first two OCM sweeps. One of the main findings in their study was the high age of offenders involved in organized crime. Older offenders were overrepresented in their sample, compared to offenders committing high-volume crimes. Kleemans and De Poot explain this overrepresentation and the commonly found phenomenon of adult onset in organized crime offenders by the divergent nature of organized crime and the fact that traditional research on criminal careers has tended to focus on high-volume crime and general crimes. They discuss several involvement mechanisms for organized crime. Social ties, whether en-

suing from work or sideline and leisure activities, serve as an important start-
ing point for many individuals who engage in organized crime. Life events,
especially those related to individuals' financial situation, were also found to
be related to engagement in organized crime activities. All the involvement
mechanisms identified by Kleemans and De Poot follow the line of dynamic
theories: social ties, work ties, leisure activities and sidelines, and life events.
They conclude that their findings are explained by the *social opportunity struc-
ture*, thus emphasizing the importance of social ties and the access these pro-
vide to organized crime opportunities. At the same time, the *social opportunity
structure* also explains phenomena such as late-onset offending and individu-
als who switch from conventional professions to organized crime. Some indi-
viduals will have access to organized crime opportunities from an early age,
while some will have access to these contacts only later on in life, and others
will never come across these opportunities. Hence, these opportunities have
an unequal distribution across the population and across the life courses of
individuals.

The study of Kleemans and De Poot is an important first step in explain-
ing involvement in organized crime. The current study builds upon their find-
ings by exploring careers of organized crime offenders in more detail, relating
these careers to those of common offenders and adding new approaches, data
sources and research questions.

1.5   Current research questions

The central aim of this thesis is to explore the life courses of organized crime
offenders and to explain how these individuals become engaged in organized
crime. The focus is on longitudinal crime patterns of organized crime offend-
ers and on seeking explanations for these patterns. Barely any longitudinal
research has so far been conducted on distinct groups of offenders such as
those involved in organized crime (for some exceptions, see Leeper Piquero
and Benson, 2004; Kleemans and De Poot, 2008). It is still unclear, therefore,
whether the knowledge to date on criminal careers and crime involvement
mechanisms applies equally to different types of offenders and different types
of crime. This main focus of this thesis can be broken down into the multiple
research questions discussed in the various chapters.

Chapter 2 examines whether different pathways can be distinguished
among organized crime offenders. The aim of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it
explores the shape of organized crime offenders' criminal histories and elab-
orates on the patterns that can be distinguished within this group. Longitu-
dinal studies on crime have identified multiple groups of offenders with sim-
ilar criminal pathways over time (see, for example, Moffitt, 1993; Nagin and
Land, 1993). We test whether such distinct groups also exist among organized

crime offenders and apply semi-parametric group-based models to the criminal histories of organized crime offenders. Secondly, the chapter examines whether these criminal patterns relate to (1) the role an offender fulfils in a crime group (leader, coordinator, lower-level or another role) and (2) the type of organized crime in which the offender is involved (drugs, fraud, or another type of crime).

The extent to which the criminal histories of those involved in organized crime resemble those of the general offender population is examined in chapter 3. To provide insight into their criminal histories, offenders in the run-up to an organized crime case are systematically compared with offenders in the run-up to a common case by examining the prevalence, frequency and seriousness of their prior offending. This comparison identifies the main characteristics of criminal life courses of organized crime offenders, and at the same time puts these findings into the context of a mainstream criminal career. In doing so, we test whether existing knowledge on criminal careers and crime involvement also applies to organized crime and its offenders.

While the first part of this thesis provides a detailed description of the criminal trajectories leading up to involvement in organized crime, the second part aims to explore individual involvement mechanisms for organized crime. Its focus is on explaining and elaborating upon findings from the quantitative research by clarifying how and why individuals engage in organized crime. Involvement mechanisms are discussed in the light of theories aiming to explain change in criminal behaviour (see, for example, Sampson and Laub, 1993). Theoretical ideas are illuminated by empirical findings gathered in two ways. Firstly, an extensive analysis of police files on fifteen criminal groups from the OCM was conducted (chapter 4). Several distinctive involvement mechanisms are discussed within the diversity of individual involvement processes, while case studies extracted from the files are used to illuminate specific resources – such as knowledge, skills and equipment – that make offenders suited to contributing to a particular organized crime group. Secondly, in-depth interviews were held with sixteen organized crime offenders to discuss how they got involved in organized crime activities (chapter 5). This study examines the nature of relationships between co-offenders and the balance between reliability and capability, while also exploring the offender resources that can contribute to a crime group and enlarge the pooled resources of the group.

1.6   Data

Obtaining information on organized crime offenders and their activities is not self-evident. As in the case of all criminological research based on register data, the process of selection starts with selective police priorities, with the

selections becoming increasingly restrictive throughout the judicial process. Organized crime constitutes a separate section of Dutch Law that prohibits participation in an organization with the intent to commit offences. However, not all offenders involved in organized crime ultimately get convicted under this particular section of the Law. Some are instead convicted for more concrete activities such as importing drugs or falsifying identity documents.[10]

For these reasons, the main data source for this thesis – the OCM – is based on a selection of individuals involved in organized crime. This selection was based on an extensive inventory of police investigations into criminal groups in the Netherlands. The OCM aims to examine a broad spectrum of various manifestations of organized crime and offenders. Such a selection additionally allows for individuals and the group as a whole to be studies as the OCM not only provides information at an individual offender level, but also information on the other offenders in this group and on the crime group as a collaboration of offenders. The OCM is a unique dataset that combines multiple sources of information on a large number of criminal groups involved in a variety of types of organized crime, and on an even larger number of offenders involved in these criminal groups. The fact that this selection is based on crime groups rather than individuals makes it interesting as it allows for examination of individual involvement mechanisms in the context of interrelationships within a criminal group.

In chapters 2 and 3, the most quantitative part of the thesis, we use the OCM in combination with a comparative sample of the general offender population. In chapter 4, which is the first qualitative study in the thesis, police files on fifteen criminal groups included in the OCM are analysed extensively. This sample of fifteen crime groups from the OCM is constructed in way best reflecting the heterogeneity of organized crime and its offenders. Chapter 5 adopts a new and narrower selection of sixteen organized crime offenders, who have been imprisoned after being convicted under the organized crime section of Dutch Law. In-depth interviews with these inmates were held. The richness and variety of the data obtained allowed a mixed method approach to be employed in the thesis. The use of quantitative and qualitative research methods contributed to the validity of the study (Webb et al., 2000). All methods have their own weaknesses and strengths. By combining multiple data sources and methods, weaknesses in individual methods are compensated by the strengths of other methods (Denzin, 1989). The information sources used are discussed in more detail below. Figure 1 gives an overview of the sources and studies.

---

[10]Similar difficulties with selecting organized crime offenders based on their conviction have been found in, for example, the United States (Mutrux, 2011). Not all organized crime offenders in the Netherlands are prosecuted for violation of the *Organized Crime Act* (Deelneming aan criminele organisatie, Art. 140 WvSr) and this particular section of the law is also applied to a broader range of offenders, not only those engaged in organized crime.

1.6.1 Organized Crime Monitor

The Organized Crime Monitor (OCM, figure 1-A) is an ongoing research project coordinated by the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice, Erasmus University Rotterdam and VU University Amsterdam. The research question at the heart of the OCM reads: What is the nature of organized crime in the Netherlands and which developments can be recognized (Kleemans et al., 1998)? The main sources for this ongoing research project were files of completed police investigations of criminal groups in the Netherlands, often spanning periods of several years. The current study uses of the first three sweeps of the OCM.[11] Each sweep systematically analyses forty large-scale and closed Dutch police investigations of criminal groups.[12] A total of 120 large-scale investigations were studied (40 case studies in each sweep) between 1994 to 2006,[13] resulting in a cross-section of case studies on various forms of organized crime and involving 1,623 offenders.[14] Extensive analyses were carried out to gain insight into the activities, processes and individuals involved in these criminal groups, with information being gathered on (1) the nature of the criminal group, (2) the group's criminal activities, (3) contacts between the criminal group and its environment (including modes of shielding their activities from the authorities), (4) illegally acquired profits, expenses and investments, and (5) criminal prosecution/settlement. These analyses resulted in systematic case descriptions, with information on a variety of dimensions of the criminal group. The analysis of each criminal group started with interviewing police officers and public prosecutors. During these interviews, a list of points of special interest was used to make sure all important aspects were discussed and also to ensure consistency between the analyses of different criminal groups. Subsequently, other relevant sources were studied, including official records, observation reports,

---

[11] A fourth sweep of thirty cases was gathered recently (Kruisbergen et al., 2012). These cases were not included in the analyses within this thesis.

[12] The police investigations examined are not a random, representative sample of organized crime in the Netherlands. First of all, even if all police investigations on criminal groups were to be analysed, this would still be a selection of the criminal groups dealt with by the authorities. The selection is also sensitive to priorities, both in the decision to concentrate on specific kinds of organized crime and in the decision to focus on specific individuals or dimensions within a criminal group.

[13] All the criminal groups examined meet the Fijnaut research group's definition: *Groups primarily focused on illegal profits systematically commit crime that adversely affect society and are capable of effectively shielding their activities, in particular by being willing to use physical violence or eliminate individuals by way of corruption* (Fijnaut et al., 1998: 26-27). The OCM uses a wide interpretation of *shielding of activities*. It includes the threat and use of violence, corruption, and also the use of cover businesses, code language, and misuse of certain occupational groups, such as notaries, public lawyers, and accountants (Kleemans et al., 1998).

[14] Strictly speaking, they are suspects as they were selected based on the fact they were considered suspects by the authorities, although the large majority have been prosecuted and convicted.

Figure 1. Overview of data sources
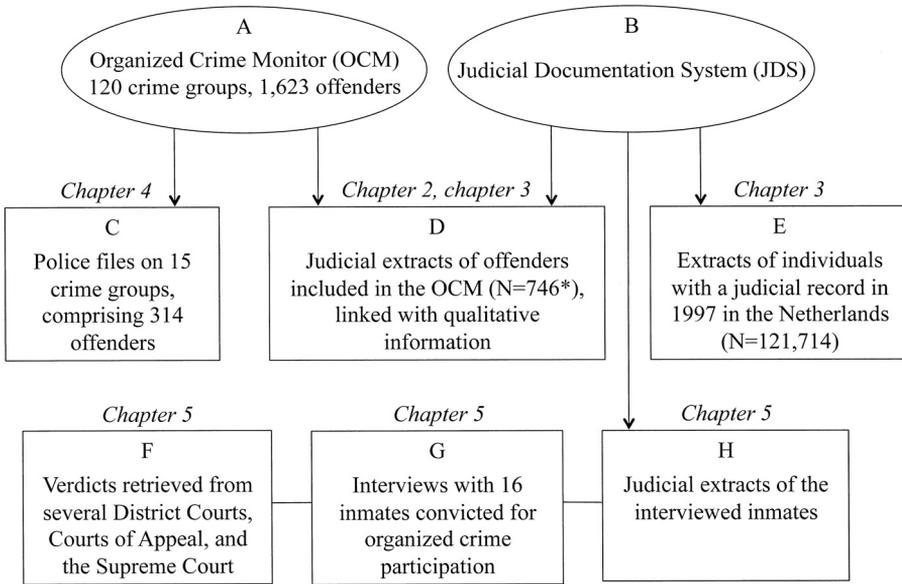
*A somewhat different selection was used in chapter 2 (N=856, see footnote 15 for more information)

transcripts of wiretaps and interrogations. A substantial part of this information has been categorized and coded (for more information, see Kleemans, 2004; Van de Bunt and Kleemans, 2007).

It is important to note that, compared to other countries, Dutch criminal investigations provide a lot of factual information on offender behaviour due to the extensive use of wiretapping, observation techniques and other special investigation methods, and the absence of plea bargaining. Having access to the original police files meant that the nature of the criminal behaviour could be verified to a large extent by the researchers themselves. Hence, the 120 case studies are rich in empirical detail and provide a lot of qualitative contextual information about criminal careers and involvement mechanisms. With whom did offenders co-operate? What relationships existed between offenders? What activities were carried out? What part did offenders play in these activities? What is known about their criminal careers from intrusive investigation methods and existing police information?

Based on this information, criminal groups as a whole can be categorized as committing a specific kind of organized crime. Many of the activities these groups engage in boil down to different forms of transit crime. In other words,

international smuggling activities. The majority of offenders were involved in a criminal group producing or trafficking *drugs*. Much smaller numbers were involved in organized *fraud*, such as large-scale evasion of levies and taxes through cross-border cigarette smuggling. All other offenders were involved in less common kinds of organized crime, such as smuggling illegal immigrants, human trafficking, arms smuggling, or trafficking of stolen vehicles. Some criminal groups in the monitor were also unique in their criminal activities. One criminal group, for example, was involved in racketeering in real estate transactions. At least a couple of criminal groups were involved in multiple types of organized crime simultaneously and with roughly equal intensity. Offenders in these criminal groups are categorized as being involved in *other* kinds of organized crime.

Alongside this information at a group level, we obtained information on the individual activities offenders performed. The extensive case descriptions allowed for categorizing and coding the different roles offenders fulfilled in the criminal groups. In each criminal group, one or more offenders had an executive function. These *leaders* supervised the whole process and gave orders to other group members. Other offenders – *coordinators* – planned and managed concrete criminal activities. *Lower-level* offenders – the majority – carried out these concrete activities. Offenders fulfilling *other* roles include offenders with a role that was less clear or unknown. Some suspects fulfilled more than one role in a criminal group. In such cases, only their most important role was taken into account (in the descending order of leader, coordinator, lower-level and other).

1.6.2 Two datasets: organized crime offenders and general offenders

The main source of information for this thesis was the criminal pathways of organized crime offenders included in the OCM. We obtained detailed qualitative information from police files on all offenders, and were also able to reconstruct the judicial careers of a large part of the organized crime offenders from the Dutch Judicial Documentation System (JDS, figure 1-B). The JDS contains information on every judicial contact registered at the Dutch Public Prosecutor's Office, and the ensuing verdict, for each individual from the age of 12. Extracts from the JDS are comparable to *rap sheets* in the United States. Every record of a judicial contact contains the registration date, along with details of the individual, the crime(s) attributed to that individual, and the way the case was dealt with. For this study, we used the Research and Policy Database for Judicial Documentation, a pseudonymized copy of the JDS specifically designed for research purposes, in which every individual with a criminal record has an encrypted unique personal number. An important characteristic of this data source is that it does not eliminate registered judi-

cial contacts, and so these remain available long after official retention periods have expired. This data source comprises historical judicial records from 1943 onwards. Although the JDS includes all judicial contacts recognized in Dutch Law and data used in judicial settings and criminal proceedings (WODC, 2011), we did not include records on minor offences such as speeding offences in our analyses (for more information, see Wartna et al., 2011). The JDS enabled us to reconstruct the judicial histories of offenders included in the OCM, while for reasons of comparison, we also used an extract showing all offenders who had a criminal record in the Netherlands in 1997.

The transnational orientation of organized crime in the Netherlands means many foreign offenders are also involved. Information on prior arrests for foreign offenders is considered unreliable because the Dutch judicial system does not hold data on judicial contacts in other countries. For that reason, we used a subset of offenders born in the Netherlands. Of the 1,623 offenders included in the OCM, 795 were born in the Netherlands. Information on all their judicial contacts was extracted from the JDS. However, 49 offenders (6 per cent of the total) could not be traced and linked to their information from the JDS. There are two reasons why certain offenders were not found in the JDS. Firstly, offenders may have been prosecuted outside the Netherlands and therefore not have a Dutch judicial record. Some case descriptions indeed mention a foreign conviction. Secondly, the failure to link information from the JDS could be attributable to more technical reasons, such as if offenders are not properly registered in the JDS or names and surnames are spelled differently. The remaining 746 offenders were able to be traced in the JDS, and so provided us with information on their official records. We obtained information on their organized crime case, i.e. the case for which they were included in the OCM, and all their judicial records before and after that case up until 2010. For the sake of convenience, we refer to this OCM-case as their *criterion case*.[15]

For the comparison between organized crime offenders and general offenders (chapter 2), we used an extract from the JDS of all offenders with a judicial record in the Netherlands in 1997. Although the year 1997 was selected for practical reasons, it is also covered by the OCM selection period. For the purposes of comparison, out of the total of 173,464 offenders with a judicial record in 1997, we selected only those 121,714 who were born in the

---

[15]The second chapter uses a somewhat wider selection of organized crime offenders (N = 856) as we were also able – based on information in the police files – to identify those offenders in the OCM who were born abroad (as the OCM contains more information than the JDS), but had been living in the Netherlands from at least the age of 12. In the case of this group, crimes committed in the Netherlands or established in a Dutch investigation will, in principle, be recorded in the JDS. In this sense, their JDS histories can be regarded as complete. Although all remaining individuals may also have been convicted outside the Netherlands, this selection provides us with the most reliable information on judicial histories. For comparative reasons, we used a tighter selection in the third chapter as we had no housing information available for the 1997 extraction of general offenders.

Netherlands. The 1997 crime used as the basis for selecting the offenders is referred to as the *criterion case*. Our analyses included all contacts with Dutch judicial authorities taking place before or after this case up until 2010, as well as additive information on both the offence (type and date of offence, judicial settlement information) and the individuals (gender, date of birth).

These exercises resulted in two data files, one comprising 746 offenders included in the OCM (figure 1-D) and a second containing the judicial records of 121,714 offenders from the general offender population (figure 1-E). In both datasets, each offender had a criterion case, being the organized crime case for the OCM offenders and the 1997 case for the general offender population. Both datasets also contained information on offenders' criminal histories before their criterion case and details of any recidivism after the criterion case. Information at an offence level (type of offence, date of criminal act, judicial settlement and so on), as well as at an individual level (gender, year of birth), is included in both files, resulting in over 500 variables. The file containing OCM offenders also includes categorized information retrieved from police files on the criminal groups, such as information on an offender's role within the criminal group (on the individual level: leader, coordinator, lower-level offender or other) and the type of organized crime performed by the criminal group the offender was involved in (group level).

1.6.3 Police files

Apart from the above two quantitative data files, we had available extensive police files on all 120 crime groups included in the OCM. For the present purpose, we reanalysed a selection of fifteen cases from the OCM, using a topic list focusing on the relevant research questions. We had access to the original police files, which provided us with various kinds of police findings, as well as information provided by the offenders during their interrogations. The fifteen crime cases were selected from the OCM in a way best reflecting the heterogeneity of organized crime and its offenders. The subsequent analysis of each criminal group started with an inventory of all offenders involved. Subsequently, police files were analysed systematically, based on a topic list with the following three main points of special interest: (1) genesis of the criminal group and interrelations between offenders, (2) resources of offenders and the criminal group as a whole, and (3) motivation of offenders and life events. This information was gathered for all offenders separately and then linked to individual criminal histories, such as country and date of birth, obtained from the JDS. The most valuable information for this study was found in the interrogation records as most offenders were interrogated on many occasions. Eight of the fifteen criminal groups selected were involved in drugs, two in human smuggling, two in organized fraud, one in smuggling cigarettes, one

in human trafficking and money laundering, and one in drugs and money laundering. In contrast to the quantitative analyses based on the OCM and JDS, this qualitative analysis on the police files also included individuals born abroad. In total, the fifteen selected cases involved 314 offenders (279 men and 35 women, figure 1-C).

1.6.4   Interviews

In-depth interviews held with inmates convicted for organized crime activities comprised an important part of the multi-method approach used in this thesis. These interviews supplemented the information obtained from the OCM and the JDS as they enabled us to explore possible explanations for our quantitative findings. All prisoners in the Netherlands serving an irrevocable sentence after being convicted under the organized crime section in Dutch Law were selected at three moments in time between July 2010 and January 2011.[16] As conviction data were the only way to select all individuals whom we knew to have been involved in organized crime and imprisoned at the time, this was the best way to select and approach them. A total of 54 offenders were selected. Excluded from this inmate population were offenders who did not speak Dutch or English and those not available for other reasons, such as an inmate who was on the run at the time the interviews were being conducted. The remaining 47 inmates, all meeting the inclusion criteria of the study, were approached by prison staff and asked to participate in the study. They were handed an information letter, which briefly set out the purpose of the study and the conditions under which the inmate would take part in it. Thirty-one inmates did not want to participate in the study for a variety of reasons; some of them denied having participated in organized crime, while others just did not want to talk about their actions. The sixteen inmates who agreed to take part were held in thirteen different prisons in the Netherlands (figure 1-G).[17]

All interviews were held by two interviewers, with one interviewer primarily asking questions and the other interviewer keeping an eye on the interview themes. All interviews except one[18] were tape-recorded, subsequently transcribed, and analysed using a code scheme and labels that were refined during the analysis process. The transcriptions served as the main source of information for the interview study, although two additional data sources were gathered to complement and verify information from the interviews. Firstly, we were able to trace verdicts of their organized crime case for all partici-

---

[16]Lists of prisoners were acquired on 22 July 2010, 11 November 2010 and 5 January 2011.

[17]It should be stressed that the offenders we interviewed were not extracted from the OCM. The interviewees remained anonymous throughout the study and so may be included in the OCM or the 1997 JDS extract.

[18]One of the detainees agreed to participate in the study, but did not want the conversation to be tape-recorded.

pants (figure 1-F). These verdicts helped in more precisely defining the activities in which the inmates had been involved and their role in the crime group, and also provided information on their personal situation and prior offending. Secondly, we obtained judicial extracts from the JDS to track all participants' judicial histories (figure 1-H). These rap sheets provided insight into the prevalence, frequency and nature of earlier convictions and were intended to complement and triangulate what offenders were telling us. As well as providing additional information, the verdicts and rap sheets also served as cross-validation of what we were told by the participants. The narratives of the offenders themselves were largely confirmed by the verdicts and rap sheets.

1.7   Thesis outline

The central aim of this thesis is to explore and describe the life courses of organized crime offenders and to explain how these individuals become involved in organized crime. The research questions discussed in the first two empirical chapters are restricted to the officially registered criminal histories of offenders and take a quantitative approach. The fourth and fifth chapters deploy qualitative research methods to study the involvement mechanisms of organized crime offenders. By using diverse research methods and data sources we were able to trace individuals' criminal careers towards organized crime, based on a large and mainly quantitative dataset, and subsequently to finalize this exploration with the help of detailed qualitative data.

The thesis starts, in chapter 2, with a detailed examination of organized crime offenders' criminal histories. Firstly it examines whether patterns can be distinguished in the criminal histories of organized crime offenders. Semi-parametric group-based models are applied to the criminal histories to identify groups of offenders with similar offending trajectories over time. Secondly, it examines whether a relationship exists between these criminal patterns and (a) the role an offender performs in a crime group and (b) the type of organized crime in which the offender is involved.

Chapter 3 builds on the second chapter by providing a systematic comparison between the criminal histories of organized crime offenders included in the OCM and the criminal histories of the general offender population with a judicial contact in 1997. The purpose of this comparison is to examine whether criminal histories of offenders of organized crime, resemble or differ from the criminal histories of a cross-section of the general offender population. Both groups are made comparable in terms of age at the time of the criterion case; in other words, the organized crime case for the organized crime offenders, and the 1997 case for the general offenders. Hence, we compare two groups of offenders who committed an offence at the same moment in their lives, an

organized crime offence for one group, and any type of crime for the other. Both offender groups are then compared on core dimensions of their criminal careers: prevalence, frequency and seriousness of offending. After this broad comparison between these two groups, we further differentiate between offenders from both offender groups with criterion cases relating to fraud and drugs. These comparisons provide additional information on differences between different manifestations of organized crime, while also testing the robustness of the findings from the broad comparison.

The analyses in chapters two and three are restricted to the criminal lives of individuals. The fourth chapter explores the question of how individuals become involved in organized crime. Its focus is on understanding and elaborating upon findings from the quantitative research by clarifying how and why individuals engage in organized crime. Several distinctive involvement mechanisms are discussed within the diversity of individual involvement processes. Theoretical ideas are illuminated by empirical findings based on an extensive analysis of police files on fifteen criminal groups from the OCM. We elaborate on how offenders got to know each other, the nature of contacts between co-offenders, and how individual offenders contribute to a criminal group.

Chapter 5 expands the research questions discussed in the fourth chapter by adding a new dimension through its research method. Sixteen inmates, all convicted for participation in organized crime, are interviewed on their perceptions of how they got involved in organized crime. The interviews with these inmates are semi-structured and elaborate on how they reached this point in their lives, their childhood and family, their educational and occupational histories, their criminal history, and the origins of their contact with their co-offenders in organized crime. Based on sixteen in-depth interviews, we distinguish two groups and compared them on the basis of their involvement mechanisms. Information obtained from the interviews serves as the main material for this chapter, although verdicts and criminal histories of the interviewees were gathered for cross-validation purposes.

Chapter 6 provides a general discussion of the main findings by integrating theoretical and empirical findings from the previous chapters and addressing how these contribute to the current state of knowledge.