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Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis aimed to increase our understanding of the relationship between family formation and engagement in criminal offending among contemporary high-risk young adults. Drawing on the existing criminological and sociological literature, the goal of this thesis was three-fold. First, by adopting a developmental perspective, this dissertation focused on identifying and explaining influences of family life events on criminal offending. Second, motivated by the lack of knowledge regarding the effects of criminal offending on family life events, this thesis also aimed to explain the opposite direction of the relationship, namely the effects of criminal involvement on family formation. Third, this thesis investigated whether the bidirectional influences between family formation and crime differed for males and females, and whether conclusions vary across different Western-European countries (The Netherlands and Norway).

This dissertation is special in the sense that it investigates various aspects of the family life and their relationship with different criminal career dimensions. With regard to family formation, the focus has not only been on union formation (as much research has been), but also on union dissolution and parenthood. Moreover, by studying a contemporary cohort of high-risk juveniles, the growing diversity in living arrangements (marriage, cohabitation and non-cohabitation relationships, parenthood in and out of wedlock) could be taken into account. With regard to criminal behavior, the empirical studies presented in this thesis examined several different dimensions of the criminal career. Some of the analyses explained criminal participation, and therefore identified whether individuals were involved in crime (or not) over defined periods in the life-course. Other analyses focused on understanding variations in crime levels, hence they investigated changes in the frequency of offending. Furthermore, other analyses were directed towards the nature of crimes committed and concentrated on more serious types of offenses (including violent offenses, property offenses, danger-setting offenses, drug offenses, weapons offenses), as well as specific types of offenses such as property and violent offenses (occurring relatively frequently in our sample).

This chapter is structured as follows. First, Section 6.2 provides a review of the main findings. In Section 6.3 the contributions of this thesis will be discussed. Next, in Section 6.4, the potential implications for criminal prevention policy and practice will be addressed. Finally, in Section 6.5, the limitations of this thesis will be outlined and several directions for future research will be proposed.

2. SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

2.1. Influences of family life events on criminal offending

2.1.1. *The effect of union formation, union dissolution and parenthood on criminal offending*

The first research question was whether family life events have the potential to alter involvement in crime. Chapter 2 of this thesis investigated the effects of marriage, divorce

and parenthood on serious offending. The analyses showed that marriage and parenthood are associated with a significant decrease in offending. However, these effects were identified only for males. The findings for males are in line with results of previous studies (Sampson and Laub 1990; Farrington and West 1995; Theobald and Farrington 2009), and tend to support the assumption that marriage and parenthood act as criminal path modifiers. Interestingly, although theoretical propositions that can be derived from theories on informal social control, routine activities and cognitive transformation do not state that the influences of family events on crime differ between males and females, our study found evidence of such differences.

Starting from the fact that in modern society marriage and parenthood are not necessarily connected events (as individuals are often not married when having children, or may marry without having children), in Chapter 2 of this thesis I conducted analyses to understand the individual and combined effects of these two family events on serious offending. Again, for females these events were unrelated to offending. Results for males are in line with the study of Skardhamar and Lyngstad (2009), and show that the beneficial influence of a marital union was observed only when combined with parenthood (coined as the ‘full family package’), whereas being a father reduced the rate of offending regardless of whether the respondent was married or not. This study shows that a full family package is, for men, associated with the largest reduction in offending and illustrates the combined effects of family-life transitions.

Recent decades have been characterized by an increase in divorce rates. This increase makes it more relevant to examine the association between divorce and crime. Chapter 2 of this thesis analyses the effects of divorce on criminal offending. Although the results showed that about half of the marital unions ended in divorce, this potentially influential factor was not directly associated with changes in offending. A possible explanation for this finding is that these individuals engaged in new romantic relationships (often cohabitations) after separation. Thus, the hypothesized negative effect of divorce may have dissipated, because many individuals were already engaged in a new relationship.

2.1.2. *Explaining the effect of union formation on criminal offending*

The second research question examined which mechanisms account for the effects of marriage on crime. Given the complexity of this question, answers to it were provided in different studies discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

First, in Chapter 2, I followed the assumptions of Laub and Sampson (2003) who emphasized that the preventive effects of family-life transitions emanate from the quality of the bond, and not from the occurrence of the family-life transition itself. The authors further suggest that these “good” social bonds develop gradually and accumulate over time (Laub, Nagin, and Sampson 1998; Laub and Sampson 2003). For this study, I used the length of marriage as an indicator of the strength of marital attachment, and expected the occurrence of crime to decrease with longer marital unions. This hypothesis was not confirmed by the analyses, as the duration of marriage did not significantly influence the rate of serious offending. Although these analyses showed that the duration of marriage does not influence offending, future research should include other measures on the strength of the social bond such as (prospective) information on the

perceived quality of the relationship. Unfortunately, such information was not available in this study.

Second, in Chapter 3, another qualitative element of marital unions was studied, namely, the criminal propensity of the intimate partner. This study was based on the hypothesis that marriages to criminal spouses may result in increased offending (Akers and Lee 1996). The study design of this chapter focused on married high-risk individuals and their partners, and followed their criminal careers in parallel, using a detailed time-frame (information on a monthly basis). The analyses showed that for both males and females, being married to a partner who is criminally active is associated with a significantly increased risk of offending, regardless of similarities in criminal history before marriage. However, for males such influences were visible only in the same month (proximal effects), whereas for females these criminogenic influences were observed up until the third month after the partner had offended (prolonged effects).

2.1.3. Explaining the effect of parenthood on criminal offending

The third research question focused on mechanisms explaining the effect of parenthood on criminal behavior. Detailed answers to this question were presented in Chapters 2 and 4. The following section presents an overview of the main results.

In Chapter 2, it was studied whether changes in the frequency of serious offending were different when experiencing parenthood for the first time, or when additional children were born. Results of the multilevel analyses showed that the birth of the first child acts as a turning point in the criminal career, and additional children have no significant effect on serious offending. However, this conclusion holds only for males (for females we found no influence of parenthood on offending). Results for males seem to be in line with explanations related to role changes (parenthood as a transformative event), as parenthood influenced offending only when experiencing this role for the first time.

In the introductory chapter (Chapter 1), I distinguished between four dominant criminological frameworks, all assuming a causal association between parenthood and offending (informal social control, changes in daily routines, cognitive transformation and strain). Chapter 4 provided a unique design, able to test these mechanisms simultaneously. By applying the generalized additive modeling, I was able to present a detailed description of the criminal trajectories of the males and females who experienced parenthood within the observation period, and identified the timing of change in criminal trajectories related to the entrance into parenthood. Results of these analyses showed that, for both males and females, reductions in the probability to offend occurred prior to the birth of the first child (or even pregnancy), pointing to the possibility that a factor other than the experience of parenthood itself offers the incentives for change. However, after childbirth, the probabilities to offend followed a steep upward trend for males, and only slightly increased for females. From the shape of the overall trends, we conclude that parenthood does have a beneficial effect on criminal involvement. However, the experience of parenthood seems to represent only a path accelerator, as suggested by Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph (2002). Moreover, the effect of entry into parenthood seems only temporary, and tends to gradually lose its strength in the years following childbirth. With the goal to further explain increases in crime after childbirth, Chapter 4 also examined the hypothesis that financial

parental strain might represent an explanation for the upward trend (Shannon and Abrams 2007). The analyses found no support for the economic proposition as the probabilities to offend after childbirth remained largely unexplained by involvement in property offending (for both males and females). An interesting result was that no significant shift in criminal offending was observed in the month when the child was born (with one exception: Dutch males; however, even for this group the effect was only marginally significant). The lack of such an effect shows that the expected drastic changes in daily activities related to the presence of a child do not seem to alter criminal trajectories.

A specific focus of the study presented in Chapter 4 was to understand whether the influence of parenthood on offending differs by social context. For that, I studied the timing of change in criminal offending around entrance into parenthood for two Western-European nations (The Netherlands and Norway) using similar samples and methodology. Analyses identified relatively similar trends for both countries, showing that the probabilities to offend decline before childbirth for both males and females, and increase after childbirth (stronger for males). Next to similarities in overall shape, some country specificities were observed as well. The steeper decline for Dutch males occurring before childbirth followed by a steeper increase in the years following birth could be explained by differences in paternal facilities offered in the two countries. One possible explanation for the country differences is that the less advantageous benefits in The Netherlands (short paternity leave, less unpaid leave, high day-care costs) may prepare individuals to anticipate the negative consequences of crime earlier. For instance, since men are often seen as the primary breadwinners, they may understand that their role as a provider may be impaired by criminal involvement. As such, they prepare their transition into parenthood long before the effective transition occurs. However, the limited paternal facilities in The Netherlands may expose fathers to financial and/or emotional pressure, leading to stronger increases in crime involvement compared to Norway. Although for Dutch and Norwegian females the timing of change is similar, the intensity of change differs. The downturn in the criminal trend before childbirth is steeper for Norwegian females, whereas the upturn after childbirth is more accentuated for Dutch females. Given these results, this dissertation hypothesizes that the more friendly family policies in Norway may be associated with short and long-term beneficial effects of motherhood on offending. However more research is needed before starting with certainty that the observed differences are related to social policies.

2.2. Influences of criminal offending on family life events

The fifth and sixth research questions aimed to extend our knowledge on whether and, if so, under which circumstances criminal behavior influences union formation and union dissolution. The study developed to answer these questions (Chapter 5) was unique in using both official registrations from national databases, as well as self-reported events through life history calendars. As such, the study did not investigate only marital unions, but also cohabiting and non-cohabiting romantic relationships. Analyses revealed that the likelihood to be involved in a romantic relationship (regardless of its type) is negatively influenced by past offending for both males and females, whereas current offending does not influence engagement in romantic

unions. These results are in line with results from previous studies (Huebner 2007; van Schellen, Poortman, and Nieuwbeerta 2011), suggesting that there are long term effects of criminal offending. It could be that an individual who once engaged in crime is labeled as criminal (Paternoster and Iovanni 1989), and this label affects his/her future life experiences and choices. As a result, he or she may be more likely to expand a criminal life-style that would have cumulative and perpetual effects on his/her romantic involvement. Next, whereas for men (current or past) criminal offending had no influence on union dissolution, for females it was the current offending having this influence. However, as a clear temporal order between current offending and union dissolution could not be established, it remains unclear whether engagement in crime leads to union dissolution, or whether the separation itself somehow promotes engagement in crime.

This study also investigated whether different types of offenses, in particular violent and property offenses, influence romantic unions in different ways. The analyses showed that for men violent behavior was associated with a lower likelihood to be involved in a romantic relationship (and also to terminate a relationship), whereas for females only property offending had this effect. These results show that males and females engaging in crime may be differentially perceived by their (potential) partners. In other words, whereas for males the negative effect of crime on romantic relationships occurs once more serious offenses are committed (violent offenses), for females the unfavorable consequences are already in effect when property offenses are committed. This higher ‘tolerance’ for males’ criminal involvement may be explained by the fact that our sample constituted a high-risk group. Especially for disadvantaged individuals, men engaging in less serious crimes may not be perceived as deviant. On the contrary, his criminal behavior may also be seen as a reflection of a masculine trait (being an extravert, risk taking, powerful, protective, etc.) making him attractive on the mating market. Furthermore, it may also be that the criminally engaged male is often the sole provider in the family, making the partner more tolerant of less serious criminogenic acts, as leaving the relationship is very costly. However, this criminal acceptance dissipates when men engage in violent offending (which can be even domestic violence), showing that such behavior may be considered as threatening and unacceptable in establishing or maintaining romantic unions.

3. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE THESIS

3.1. Influences of family formation on crime

This thesis aimed to understand whether different family events influence crime (as the dynamic theories argue), or whether such influences are explained by an individual’s tendency to select him/herself into specific family statuses (as the static theories predict). The analyses in this thesis have shown that for men both marriage and parenthood act as criminal path modifiers, regardless of pre-existing differences in personal experiences and individual characteristics (e.g. youth offending, impulsivity, social skills, level of education, IQ).

This dissertation also provided a more refined understanding of the impact of family formation on crime. *First*, the analysis of a contemporary sample enabled us to disentangle

the effects of marriage and parenthood on crime. While for females these two family events did not influence levels of crime, for males the results showed that parenthood acts as a stronger suppressor of offending than marriage. Moreover, for males, the combination of the two events (marriage and parenthood) should be regarded as the most beneficial family environment acting as a crime inhibitor. Whereas existing dynamic theories acknowledge the effects of family formation on crime, they do not allocate different weights to various family events. This dissertation shows the need for doing so. *Second*, this thesis extended existing knowledge on the influence of family formation on crime by investigating different characteristics of the family events, and understanding some of the mechanisms explaining criminal and non-criminal adaptation. With regard to marital unions, this dissertation provided evidence for dynamic criminal influences between spouses, occurring over and above the existence of pre-marital similarities in criminal involvement. Put differently, the negative consequences of one's crime tend to replicate in the relationship, and even a non-criminal man or woman has an increased risk of offending as soon as the partner engages in crime. With regard to parenthood, this dissertation adopted a broad approach and tested both the direction of change, as well as the timing of change associated with this family event. Given the design, this thesis offered a better understanding of multiple (sometimes competing) theoretical propositions explaining change in crime. The analyses conducted showed that transition into parenthood hinders criminal involvement. This result is in line with expectations derived from informal social control theory. In addition, extended analyses showed that criminal participation already declines before entering parenthood (or pregnancy), and does not change drastically at childbirth. Our analyses were therefore able to unveil how parenthood acts more as a hook for change (as expected by cognitive transformation theory) rather than an activator of criminal change (as expected by informal social control and routine activities theories). Moreover, the strong decline in crime observed around the first birth is short-lived, and the period following birth is associated with increases in criminal participation. This implies that, at least for some individuals (men in particular), any awareness of increased responsibility of being a parent appears to wear off quickly, and individuals fall back into old patterns. This thesis also aimed to understand whether crime involvement around the transition into parenthood is economically driven. Our analyses showed that increases in criminal participation after childbirth are not restricted to increases in property offending (for either males or females). Thus, it is unlikely that these increases can be attributed only to greater financial needs for parents with young children.

3.2. Influences of crime on family formation

This thesis also aimed to explain the influence of criminal behavior on experiencing different family roles, and it focused, in particular, on the effect of crime on union formation and union dissolution. The study analyzing this opposite direction of the relationship benefited from the possibility of including self-reported information recorded through life-history calendars. As such, in addition to marriage, I was also able to study cohabiting and non-cohabiting relationships. The analyses showed that every offense committed in the past increases the risk of remaining single or in non-cohabiting relationships. However, recent

offending did not influence union formation. This differentiation in the effects of present and past offending shows that a possible stigma mechanism remains visible in the long run, and the negative label associated with offending cumulates over time (with every offense committed in the past, the likelihood of future union formation is reduced). An important question is whether the observed effects are the result of a crime related mechanism (e.g. stigma), or may be explained by selection (such as by the inability to properly socialize and bond). Whereas selection mechanisms may still play a role in individuals' choices, the control provided for several background and individual characteristics (e.g. IQ, social skills, family environment), strengthened the conclusion that involvement in crime itself still plays a role in individuals' relationship formation. With regard to union dissolution, the results show that involvement in crime increases the chances of separation. However, such effects were observed only for females and only for current offending. This suggests a different perception of criminal involvement among males and females, with males' offending encountering a higher tolerance by romantic partners than offending by females.

By focusing not only on the influences of family formation on crime, but also on the opposite direction of the relationship, this thesis provided evidence that the effects occurring in the family formation – crime linkage are reciprocal. As an example, when engaging in crime one does not only reduce the chances for family life, but also reduces the chances to benefit from the positive influences of family roles on criminal involvement. Moreover, from a theoretical perspective, this interplay between family formation and crime shows that multiple mechanisms explain individuals' behaviors throughout young adulthood.

3.3. Gender differences in the relationship between family formation and crime

This thesis increased our knowledge of the differences between males and females, and showed how their criminogenic and family formation behaviors influence each other in different ways. This knowledge has long constituted a spectacular gap in criminology, with virtually all of the existing theories being male centered and tested. The following section discusses some of the gender differences observed in our analyses.

The analyses showed that the influence of family formation on crime differs by gender. Specifically, marriage and parenthood reduce offending for males, but these family events provide minimal incentives for declines in offending for females. As males are more frequent offenders than females, it could be that the effects of family formation on crime for females were minimal as little variation in crime levels existed for this group. This thesis also aimed to understand whether specific characteristics of the marital relationship influence offending. As such, we analyzed whether the criminal behavior of the spouse plays a role in one's offending, and whether potential effects differ by gender. Results showed that both males and females have a higher likelihood to engage in crime when the spouse offends (regardless of the criminal background of the spouse before marriage). However, gender differences occur in how long the influence of the partner lasts. For males, the risk to engage in crime is high only in the same month when partner offends (instantaneous effect), whereas for females the risk remains elevated for several months after partner's offending (prolonged effect). An explanation for these gender differences may be rooted in the gender roles that

individuals embrace in marriage. More specifically, as females (especially disadvantaged ones such as the high-risk females in our study) tend to adopt roles as housewives and primary care-givers for children, they may be more dependent on their breadwinning male partners, and this dependence may have made them more vulnerable to partner pressure to engage in crime. Such an explanation is however tentative, and should be tested using different data and methods.

Another interesting difference between males and females is the influence of parenthood on crime. This effect was expected to be stronger for females, as pregnancy and baby care likely lead to larger changes in daily routines and bonding. This expectation did not prove to be supported. However, additional analyses provided a more nuanced picture regarding the transition into parenthood. For both males and females, a certain level of readiness for change exists before the effective entrance into parenthood, as the decline in criminal involvement is initiated before the birth of the first child. However, for males the effects were more gradual and started long before childbirth, suggesting that their parental role preparation starts earlier than that of females. In addition, the influence of the event of childbirth itself on crime was stronger for males. As females are in general less criminally active, and, in addition, may prepare for parenthood more actively throughout pregnancy (as they physically carry the child, and should for instance not drink alcohol or use drugs while pregnant, while men may more easily continue an intensive nightlife), the changes in daily routines may be introduced gradually, and as a result no major changes at birth are observed. In contrast, for males drastic changes in daily routines may occur at the moment of childbirth itself. The intriguing fact is that for both males and females, even though parenthood activates or facilitates the desire of conformity, something happens after childbirth that generates a reorientation towards crime, and this increase in criminal involvement is stronger for males. This gender difference may again be explained by a different perception and integration of provider roles. As males often assume the provider role within the family, as soon as they become fathers their responsibilities increase, and, in the absence of more legitimate ways to provide for the family, men may fall back upon crime in order to fulfill the family needs. Nonetheless, the provider role represents but one element in the criminal change after childbirth as property offending only partially explains the increase in crime. Additional stressors (e.g. family conflict given the presence of children, stress induced by increased daily-care responsibilities) need further examination.

Second, this thesis also disentangled gender differences in the influences of criminal engagement on union formation. Whereas for both males and females a history of criminal offending reduces the chances of enduring romantic unions, gender differences emerge when analyzing union dissolution. Our analyses showed that females' engagement in crime increased the likelihood of relationship breakup, whereas for males we did not find such an effect. This result may point to gender differences in the tolerance for criminal involvement. Specifically, males' engagement in crime within the relationship seems to be in a sense more easily tolerated, whereas females' engagement has more immediate negative relational consequences. This difference in tolerance is also underscored by the analyses of different types of offenses. Whereas for males a history of violent offending (and not property offending) negatively influences romantic unions, for females, engagement in property offending already has that effect. Reasoning from a labeling perspective, the knowledge that men were engaged in violent

offending classifies them as non-attractive partners, whereas for females this non-attractive stamp is already obtained after engaging in property offenses. Interestingly, we also found that males' current engagement in violent offending seems to increase the likelihood of having a relationship (but not a living-together relationship). Such a finding implies that men engaging in violent offending may have certain personal characteristics ('masculinity' as signaled by strength and a willingness to be aggressive, muscular figure etc.), making them attractive on the mating market. However, these features have only temporary benefits, as these men also run higher risks of separation.

The overall conclusion is that males seem to benefit more from family formation (leading to a reduction in crime), and face less negative family life consequences from crime engagement (either theirs or their partners) than females. Females benefit less from the potential positive influences of family events, and any negative aspects (e.g. criminal partner, relationship break up) seem to affect their lives more. One explanation for this gender differences could be that the high-risk females (and in general females engaging in crime) constitute an atypical group, displaying more severe behavioral and personality problems, determining them to engage in more detrimental life experiences.

3.4. Contextual differences in the relationship between family formation and crime

An interesting question posed by life-course researchers is whether the relationship between family formation and crime is universal or context-specific. Existing theoretical propositions seem to argue for the universality of mechanisms. However, much of the existing research did not provide direct comparisons across nations. In this thesis, I contrasted two Western European nations (The Netherlands and Norway) and examined whether the influence of parenthood on offending is similar in both countries. The analyses showed that the overall patterns of offending around entrance into parenthood are quite similar in both nations. However, the similarity in patterns observed may be related to the fact that the two countries are both Western European nations with comparable social contexts and welfare systems. It would be very interesting to examine whether analogous patterns occur when analyzing countries where family culture and social policies are different (e.g. Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, US).

Although the overall patterns of offending related to entrance into parenthood were relatively similar in The Netherlands and Norway, some country particularities were observed as well. The decline in criminal involvement occurs earlier among Dutch males, suggesting that the cognitive transformations promoting a non-criminal life-style occur earlier for this group. However, the Dutch males possibly experience more strain after childbirth as the escalation in crime is steeper for this group. For females, cognitive transformations seem to occur at about the same time in both countries (about 1.5 years before child birth). However, the escalation in crime after childbirth seems to occur only among Dutch females. Such differences in crime involvement may be explained by the discrepancy in parental packages offered within each country (considerably more advantageous in Norway), leading to differential levels of parental strain in both countries.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR CRIMINAL PREVENTION POLICY AND PRACTICE

Children with serious behavioral problems and engaging in delinquency constitute a serious problem for society as they run a high risk to become future “serious, violent, and chronic offenders” (Loeber and Farrington 2000). The treatment of these juveniles in residential care facilities aims to prevent them from future engagement in crime. However, a large proportion of these juveniles continue to offend even after release (Wartna, El Harbachi, and Van der Laan 2005). Understanding which factors can lead to a discontinuation of criminal engagement in adult life is of major importance for criminal policy and practice.

One of the most important contributions of this thesis was to provide knowledge on the circular reinforcing effects between family formation and crime. On the one side, this thesis showed that a romantic partner may stimulate a law-abiding life-style. On the other side, this thesis provided evidence that a criminally involved person encounters difficulties in engaging in romantic relationships or maintaining them. The project BONJO, started as a partnership between different organizations in the Netherlands, which provides a dating platform for (ex)incarcerated individuals, underlines how former inmates have difficulties in establishing romantic unions. While dating and marriage interventions (like interventions to lead people to employment) are hard to envisage, this thesis shows that policies that prevent individuals from committing crime, have far reaching benefits.

Another relevant aspect revealed by this dissertation is the influence of parenthood on offending. Whereas family life in general does not represent a domain in which interventions can be easily implemented, some policies may target parenthood in their strategy to diminish crime. A clear example of the potential beneficial influences of more supportive parental policies has been provided in this thesis when comparing The Netherlands and Norway. Generally, the Dutch government offers less generous parental packages than the Norwegian government. For example, fathers in The Netherlands can take two days of paid paternity leave when a child is born, whereas in Norway the father is entitled to at least 12 weeks of paternity leave. Moreover, a father in The Netherlands is entitled to 26 weeks of unpaid leave, whereas in Norway fathers are entitled to up to one year of unpaid leave. These differences in parenthood arrangements between the two countries also apply to motherhood. In Norway, a female is entitled to 46 weeks of 100% paid leave, whereas in The Netherlands a female receives 16 weeks of 100% paid leave. Next to leave entitlements related to childbirth, it is important to note that day care facilities are heavily subsidized by the Norwegian government, whereas in The Netherlands the costs for day care are relatively high. As a result, low-skilled women may rather take care of their child(ren) themselves than opt for paid employment, thus barring them from financial independence. The analyses in this thesis showed that in the case of Norway, where state support after entering parenthood is both lengthier and more generous, the escalation in crime after childbirth was lower than in the Dutch case. As such, it is important for policy developers to take note that governmental policies may also impact individuals’ choices for a crime-free life style and the ability to sustain it over a long period of time.

5. LIMITATIONS AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the current thesis increased our understanding of the interdependency between family and criminal pathways, many issues remained unresolved. Below, several of these limitations and directions for future research will be discussed.

Even though this thesis provided strong evidence on how criminal behavior and family formation influence each other, some of the secondary mechanisms underpinning these effects could not be fully unraveled as many analyses were based on official registrations (the only exception is the analysis in Chapter 5). These official sources were able to provide detailed high-quality data to identify causal relationships as they systematically followed individuals over long periods of time without being affected by recall issues and underreporting. However, the restricted information on mechanisms that is available in registers limited the opportunities to fully explain identified effects. For example, this thesis showed that parenthood represents the strongest family-related crime inhibitor. However, this thesis could not yet explain what determines individuals to move away from crime when entering parenthood. As such, the agenda for future research may want to include information obtained from in depth interviews with respondents (or a smaller subsample), designed to understand what exactly motivates parents to avoid crime. In such an interview, particular attention could be paid to whether the presence of the new born child activates some sense of responsibility and attachment that is no longer consistent with crime (as informal social control theory argues). Moreover, as changes in crime linked to parenthood were found to be temporary, future research should also focus on understanding the exact mechanism(s) explaining the criminal rebound (such as peer pressure after childbirth, financial hardship, personality traits that prevent them to maintain long-term commitments). In addition, the decline in criminal involvement occurring prior to becoming a parent also requires additional research to better understand whether these changes are related to human agency (as the cognitive transformation and identity theories state), or whether different life circumstances determine these changes (e.g. employment, the punitive system).

This thesis also investigated the influence of marriage on offending. An interesting result was that for males marriage did not reduce the rate of offending unless it was associated with parenthood. As this thesis did not have access to in-depth information on aspects of the combination between marriage and parenthood that may determine reductions in crime, in research specific attention should be paid to the measurement and analysis of the perceived quality of romantic relationships individuals engage in. This derives from the assumption that individuals experiencing the ‘full family package’ may perceive their relationships as more satisfactory than married couples without children or unmarried couples with children, therefore avoiding crime in order to preserve the high-quality relationship. Another explanation for the fact that the beneficial effect of marriage on crime occurs only in the context of a full family package is that the marriage effect is activated only when associated with other salient life events. One possible factor having a boosting effect may be labor force participation. A person having a job and being married may acquire a status of “respectability” (Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph 2002), increasing the likelihood to adopt a non-criminal life style. Unfortunately, the design of this thesis did not allow the

inclusion of information on labor force participation. My recommendation is that the relationship between family formation and crime can be better understood when incorporating such indicators in future research.

Another mechanism investigated in this thesis was whether dynamic influences in criminal offending occur between partners. Although the presence of such an effect is in line with assumptions of social learning theory, the available data did not allow me to provide answers on which of the partners is the initiator of crime and which one is the follower. Moreover, with the available information I could not conclude whether the dynamic associations in crime can be explained by imitation (one partner observes the behavior of the other and replicates it) or behavioral persuasion (a partner stimulates the other to engage in crime). To shed light on the processes of how crime is learned and transmitted within marriage, future research should conduct in depth interviews with respondents enquiring about crime initiation and the circumstances under which crime is stimulated.

Although theories differ in their account of why and how family events influence criminal offending, it is hard to disentangle these mechanisms. One way of doing so, is by studying the exact timing of changes in criminal offending. This thesis presented a descriptive analysis of the exact moment(s) of change in criminal careers, and explained that multiple mechanisms act with different strengths throughout adult life. However, such an analysis could only be conducted in relation with the transition into parenthood. The agenda of future research regarding criminal careers of high-risk individuals should include a similar approach to different adult transitions such as employment (see Skardhamar and Savolainen 2014) and marriage (see Lyngstad and Skardhamar 2013). In addition, it would be very interesting to examine whether changes in offending are associated with the age at which adults experience a transition. For example, individuals who get married and have children off-time¹⁸ (Settersen and Hagestad 1994) may show different crime patterns compared to individuals who experience these events at 'more appropriate' ages. Especially for women, these off-time transitions may play an important role in explaining the association between (early) motherhood and crime.

Although this dissertation analyzed consequences of family transitions on crime in modern society, it was not possible to capture the full diversity in family formation patterns. With regard to union formation, my focus was on the impact of marriage on crime. However, as cohabitation has become increasingly common (Billari and Liefbroer 2010), follow-up empirical research should analyze the influence of this union type on crime as well. Moreover, future research should contrast marriage and cohabitation, to clarify whether they exert similar or different effects on criminal behavior. With regard to parenthood, the current dissertation focused on official registrations and based its conclusions on the analysis of the official parental status. However, this thesis could not examine whether the effect of becoming a father on crime may be different for custodial and noncustodial parenthood. For future research, I recommend an analysis of the legal type of arrangements individuals have with their children and how this relates to criminal offending.

This thesis also studied the effects of crime on family formation. The analyses showed that criminal behavior reduces romantic opportunities and increases the chances of

¹⁸ Very early or very late in adulthood.

relationship break-up. However, the quantitative nature of the data available made it difficult to conclude whether the observed effects occur because individuals engaging in crime are seen as less interesting partners (stigma effect). When analyzing stigma effects, future research may want to understand whether individuals' lives have been affected by their criminogenic social image. To do so, research must turn again towards qualitative designs where individuals report on how their criminal behavior influences their social life. Moreover, as previous research showed that criminal individuals are stigmatized on the employment market as employers are less likely to invite them for job interviews (Pager 2003), future research could also conduct analogous experiments to understand under which circumstances prospective partners also tend to reject criminal individuals on the mating market. One such possible experiment could be conducted on dating sites, where paired profiles of various individuals are posted on-line. The pairs should contain identical profiles with the exception of criminal participation. This experimental design allows for an analysis able to identify whether individuals engaging in crime are differently treated on the dating market.

This thesis extended our understanding of gender differences in the relationship between family formation and crime by comparing patterns of behavior among males and females. In interpreting these differences, one key assumption was that the observed differences between males and females result from the different roles they assume within the family. For example, the steeper increase in criminal involvement after entry into parenthood for males may be explained by the fact that they assume the provider role, and possibly fulfill this role through illicit ways. Females' natural predisposition for pregnancy may place them in the situation to assume the main care-giver role, and criminal incentives may be reduced. The difference in role integration between genders was also advanced as an explanation for the stronger influences of male crime on the criminal engagement of the spouses. As females tend to integrate roles around the household, their dependency on the male provider increases, and this dependency may make them more vulnerable to criminal learning. This thesis was limited in testing these assumptions, as it lacked specific information on the type of roles individuals assume. As such, an analysis of labor force participation and its interaction with family formation may offer some insights in the roles assumed. Moreover, individuals' perceptions on the roles they assume within the family obtained through qualitative research designs may clarify some of the mechanisms explaining the influences of family formation on crime.

This dissertation focused on understanding how family and criminal careers are intertwined for high-risk individuals. The study of such a selective group is of particular importance for society as these individuals pose risks for the community and increase societal costs. As Cohen and Piquero (2009) showed, societal costs related to crime in these groups are substantial. However, the study of high-risk individuals has also limitations, and an important one is the impossibility to generalize the obtained results. To overcome this limitation, future research should replicate the designs implemented in this thesis on general population samples.

As a final point, to state that the causal association between crime and family formation is universal, we have to understand whether the effects and the mechanisms explaining observed effects cross the border of nations. This study was among the first to

provide a cross-country comparison. However, only the effects of parenthood on offending have been investigated across nations. Future research should investigate multiple dimensions of the family formation – crime relationship in different social environments. Moreover, as this thesis focused on two Western European countries (The Netherlands and Norway), the similarity of results obtained may be the result of comparable social systems in the two countries. To better understand whether findings on the family formation – crime linkage can be generalized, future research should include multiple countries in the comparison, where different family and penal systems are observed.