



***Criminal career patterns from adolescence to early adulthood***  
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Early adulthood is a period of profound change. In the ten years from age 18 to 28 many adolescents trade in their relative roleless existence, for a life that is increasingly imbedded in conventional society through work, marriage and parenthood. The potential crime curbing effect of these transitions is central to many criminological theories trying to explain the development of criminal behavior over the life course. According to these theories early adulthood is primarily a period of desistance from crime.

This paper describes the criminal careers from adolescence to early adulthood in the Netherlands using official crime data. Aggregate Dutch data indeed show a steep decrease in criminal behavior from age 18 to 28. More detailed analyses using individual longitudinal data however reveal that besides desistance there is also considerable continuity in criminal behavior. Persistence in criminal behavior is associated with frequent juvenile offending. Contrary to theoretical expectations a significant number of individuals start their criminal careers after age 18. Furthermore, the data show marked differences in the criminal careers of males and females and those from Dutch and non-Dutch backgrounds.

While change in criminal behavior is salient during early adulthood, this change is far from uniform across individuals. Personal characteristics may explain some of these differences, but criminal career patterns can only be fully understood when viewed as just one of the many trajectories that in mutual interaction make up the individual's life course.