

Summary

The main objective of this thesis was to advance what is known about the association between parenting and delinquency by integrating components from criminology and family research, that is, by analyzing the concepts of parenting adopted in family research in relation to criminological concepts and measures of delinquent behavior. Four overall research themes were addressed in this thesis. The first theme, *unidimensional parenting characteristics and parenting styles in relation to delinquency*, looked at the issue of whether parenting characteristics and parenting styles explain delinquent behavior. The second theme, *concurrent and over-time associations between parenting and delinquency*, examined whether findings regarding long-term links between parenting and delinquency are similar to those concerning cross-sectional links. The third theme dealt with *general delinquency and delinquency trajectories in relation to parenting*, that is, whether delinquents follow different delinquency trajectories in their life-course, and whether these distinct patterns of offending originate in families with different parenting characteristics. The fourth theme, *sex-differences in the link between parenting and delinquency*, concerned whether the sex of the child and the parent moderates the link between parenting and delinquency.

The theoretical background of this thesis is based on approaches from developmental criminology and family research. Various theories focus on the influence of child rearing on delinquency. Criminological theories focus on explaining delinquency, while theories from family research have a strong focus on the conceptualization of parenting and its effects. In developmental and life-course criminology (DLC), three approaches are identified which originate from the criminal career paradigm: the general static, the general dynamic, and the typological approach. Most static theories of delinquency operate under the assumption that the variation in criminal behavior is predominantly explained by individual differences in latent criminal propensity and that these individual differences remain constant over time. In contrast to static theories, dynamic theories postulate that criminal behavior can be modified over the life-course and that the influence of the family weakens as children age. Both static and dynamic approaches are “general,” in that their basic premise suggests that causal mechanisms account for all offenders, and all types of offences. Typological models however, suggest that several offender groups can be distinguished by different criminal trajectories. Typological theories propose that the etiology varies for offenders with different trajectories.

Two perspectives have been adopted in the parenting literature: research that is focused on dimensions of parenting, and research focusing on typologies, otherwise known as parenting styles. Two key dimensions of support and control have been used to assess the quality of parenting behavior. Typologies or parenting

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styles are constellations of parenting dimensions. Frequently analyzed parenting styles include the authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting styles. The latter is found to have the strongest association with delinquency.

Three sources of data were used in this project: (1) data from previous empirical studies (which were then analyzed in a meta-analysis), (2) empirical data from the Child-rearing and Family in the Netherlands Study, and (3) data from the Pittsburgh Youth Study. The meta-analysis included 144 previously published and unpublished manuscripts. The Child-rearing and Family in the Netherlands Study (CFNS) is a prospective longitudinal study on family functioning, which started in 1990. In the first wave, data were collected from 788 families across the country. An equal number of boys and girls participated between ages 9 to 16. Both parents and the target child were interviewed on a wide range of issues and many questionnaires about individual characteristics and perceptions of family functioning were used. Follow-up data were collected in 1995 and in 2000. The Pittsburgh Youth Study (PYS) is a prospective longitudinal study on the development of problem behavior and delinquency of boys from public schools in the inner city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the United States. The study began in 1987 and followed high-risk boys in childhood and adolescence. The total sample consisted of three cohorts of which the youngest boys were in grade 1 (about 7 years of age), the middle cohort was in grade 4 (about 10 years of age) and the oldest sample was in grade 7 (about 13 years of age). In this project, data on the youngest and oldest samples were used.

Four studies were conducted where each addressed two or more of the above-mentioned research themes (chapters 2 to 5). Chapter 2 addressed a meta-analysis on parenting characteristics and styles in relation to delinquency. In this meta-analysis, previous manuscripts were systematically analyzed, computing mean effect sizes for each parenting dimension and investigating the influence of moderators. Concurrent and longitudinal studies analyzing the link between parenting and delinquency were examined. Furthermore, the meta-analysis examined whether the sex of the child moderates the relationship between parenting and delinquency. Chapter 3 investigated the long-term associations between parenting and delinquency. This chapter focused on parenting characteristics and styles in early adolescence in relation to delinquency in young adulthood, covering a period of about 10 years. In this chapter, we used datasets from the two longitudinal studies, the PYS (oldest cohort) and the CFNS. Chapter 4 focused on links between parenting styles and different trajectories of delinquents. First, several delinquency types were identified based on self-reported and official delinquency data collected in the PYS during adolescence on the youngest cohort. Next, the links between parenting styles and these different types of delinquents were investigated. In chapter 5, using a subsample from the CFNS of 330 intact families, the relationship between fathers' and mothers' parenting

styles and delinquency in adolescence and young adulthood was addressed. Both concurrent links as well as longitudinal links between parenting typologies and delinquency were investigated. Furthermore, sex-differences in the parenting-delinquency link were studied by analyzing interaction-effects between parenting and sex on delinquency, conducting separate analyses on fathers' and mothers' parenting, and concentrating on combinations of parenting styles of fathers and mothers in relation to delinquency.

We used the four overall research themes to summarize and discuss the specific findings of the four studies described in chapters 2 to 5. In the first theme on *unidimensional parenting characteristics and parenting styles in relation to delinquency*, the issue was whether parenting characteristics and parenting styles explain delinquent behavior. Analyzing prior studies clearly revealed that parenting and delinquency were linked (chapter 2). Most aspects of parenting were significantly linked to delinquency. The strongest links were found between delinquency and the following parenting characteristics: supervision, overprotection, rejection, family process, and consistency in discipline. This indicates that particular children have a higher risk of delinquency if they have parents who know little of the child's whereabouts, keep the child dependent, reject their child, or are inconsistent in their disciplining techniques. In addition, children from families with relatively poor relations and cohesion between the members were at risk.

The results in these prior studies on parenting and delinquency strongly varied because of differences in study characteristics (chapter 2). Some parenting characteristics were more important for particular subsamples. For example, youngsters who were poorly attached and not close to their parents had an elevated risk of official delinquency, suggesting that these youngsters had more police contact and convictions than youngsters with secure attachments to their parents. Furthermore, some evidence was found to suggest that poor supervision and poor support was linked to minor delinquency. These findings suggest that it would be beneficial to conduct research on family risk factors, which contain unidimensional-parenting characteristics. Specifically, the finding that the strength of the link between parenting and delinquency is dependent on the characteristics of the sample, stresses the importance that interventions should be tailored based on specific characteristics of the family, rather than offering the same intervention to all families of delinquent youngsters.

Furthermore, parenting *styles* were found to be linked to delinquency (chapter 5). In addition, links between neglectful and authoritarian parenting styles and serious delinquency trajectories were found (chapter 4). In general, adolescents who have authoritative parents had the lowest delinquency rates compared to youngsters with parents who adopt other parenting styles. In particular, children and adolescents who engaged in delinquency were from neglectful families. Thus, several unidimensional aspects of parenting, such as poor supervision, harsh

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punishment, and a poor parent-child relationship and a neglectful parenting style elevated the risk on delinquency.

The second theme, *concurrent and longitudinal associations between parenting and delinquency*, related to the issue of whether findings regarding long-term links between parenting and delinquency are similar to those concerning cross-sectional links. The current study revealed that very few long-term effects of parenting were found. Differences between concurrent and longitudinal links with regard to the vast majority of parenting characteristics were nonsignificant (chapter 2). The established early adolescent family factors, including the bond between parent and child and punishment, did not predict later delinquency during young adulthood once antisocial behavior and demographic variables were controlled (chapter 3). This suggests that there was no unique contribution of these family factors to later delinquent behavior. Similarly, maternal parenting styles measured in late adolescence could not predict young adult delinquency (chapter 5). However, order and structure in the family measured in early adolescence was linked to young adult delinquency. In addition, the youngsters who had neglectful fathers during late adolescence engaged more often in delinquency during young adulthood. Moreover, a neglectful style measured during childhood could predict several moderate to serious delinquency trajectories in adolescence (chapter 4). In summary, most of these parenting characteristics had concurrent or short-term links to delinquency rather than longer-term links. There were however a few exceptions: a neglectful parenting style and a family climate with a lack of structure were linked to later delinquency.

The third theme dealt with *general delinquency and delinquency trajectories in relation to parenting*; that is, whether delinquents follow different delinquency trajectories in their life-course, and whether these distinct patterns of offending originate from families with different parenting characteristics. Two empirical studies in this thesis revealed that parenting styles and various unidimensional parenting characteristics are linked to *general delinquency* (chapters 3 and 5). The results of these two studies corroborated prior studies on parenting and delinquency (chapter 2). Furthermore, five adolescent delinquency trajectories were identified differing in both level of delinquency, seriousness, and the rate of change in delinquency seriousness over time: a nondelinquent, minor persisting, moderate desisting, serious persisting, and serious desisting trajectory (chapter 4). Controlling for demographic characteristics and childhood delinquency, a neglectful parenting style was linked to the moderate desisting, serious persisting, and serious desisting trajectories, suggesting that a neglectful parenting style differentiates non- or minor delinquents from more serious delinquents. Thus, boys starting at an early age with relatively serious levels of delinquency, and boys exhibiting the most serious levels of delinquency during mid-adolescence were significantly more likely to come from neglectful families than nondelinquents or youngsters committing only minor delinquent acts, such as

petty theft and vandalism with minor damage. Furthermore, an authoritarian parenting style was linked to the serious persistent delinquency trajectory. These findings indicate that boys who committed relatively serious delinquent acts throughout adolescence were more likely to come from neglectful and authoritarian families than nondelinquents.

The fourth theme, *sex-differences in the link between parenting and delinquency*, looked at the question of whether the sex of the child and the parent moderates the link between parenting and delinquency. The meta-analysis revealed that gender did not moderate the relationship between parenting characteristics and delinquency (chapter 2). In contrast, analyses on the Dutch data showed a significant interaction effect of parenting style and sex on delinquent behavior indicating that the link between parenting style and delinquency was different for boys and girls. A neglectful style was linked to the highest delinquency rates in boys, while a permissive style was related to delinquency in girls, suggesting that family processes may be different for boys and girls in relation to delinquent behavior (chapter 5).

Paternal parenting styles were found to be differently linked to delinquency compared to maternal parenting styles (chapter 5). Whereas fathers' parenting styles were concurrently linked to boys' and girls' delinquency, mothers' parenting styles were only linked to girls' delinquency. If the fathers were neglectful, the boys engaged more often in delinquency. Girls' delinquency rates were higher if the father or the mother was permissive. Longitudinal links were found between fathers' neglectful style and boys' delinquent behavior, while the link between maternal parenting styles and delinquency was nonsignificant. Furthermore, the association between combinations of paternal and maternal parenting styles and delinquency was significant (chapter 5). Boys had higher delinquency rates if both the father and the mother were neglectful. Delinquency was significantly more prevalent if both parents were neglectful than if only one of the parents was neglectful, or if both parents were non-neglectful. In contrast, girls' delinquency increased if one or both parents were permissive. Thus, the influence of parenting styles was found to be different for fathers and mothers, and combinations of paternal and maternal parenting styles were linked to delinquency. Moreover, fathers' parenting ought to be considered when examining the parenting-delinquency link.

The current project showed the relevance of using concepts of parenting from family research such as parenting styles in explaining the processes of how parents influence their children's delinquent behavior. A neglectful parenting style in childhood predicted serious delinquency trajectories in adolescence and a paternal neglectful style was associated with later delinquency in males, suggesting that a neglectful style was longitudinally linked to delinquency; unidimensional parenting characteristics were found to be linked to later delinquency to a lesser

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extent. In addition, some evidence was found to suggest that parenting styles may moderate the influence of unidimensional parenting characteristics on delinquency. Moreover, parenting styles were found to have different effects on delinquency in boys and girls, whereas parenting characteristics did not.

The studies in this thesis supported several hypotheses derived from developmental and life-course criminological models. Many of the present findings do not support the notion of general static theories - that family correlates of delinquency do not depend on age. However, these findings do support the assumption of general dynamic models, in that parenting styles in childhood are able to predict a serious delinquency trajectory, and yet that change is possible, and that bonds other than to parents may prevent an adolescent from persisting in serious delinquency. The findings in the current project indicating that the majority of parenting characteristics had more immediate and short-term effects on delinquency support the notion that change is possible. In addition, concurrent links between particular parenting characteristics and delinquency were found to vary with age in prior studies. Finally, we identified some early-starting serious delinquents who had neglectful parents, but desisted from crime during adolescence, while others persisted.

We found some support for typological models in that different delinquency trajectories were identified. However, some of the findings in chapter 5 contradict the statement of typological models that distinct delinquency trajectories stem from different etiologies. Parenting during childhood did not differentiate between the serious delinquency trajectories in our study, while, for example, Moffitt argues that the life-course persistent trajectory is characterized by inadequate parenting during childhood and that the adolescent-limited trajectory is not.

Finally, our findings with regard to sex-differences have implications for theory and practice. Boys had higher levels of delinquency if parents were neglectful, while girls more often engaged in delinquent behavior if the parents were permissive and poorly responsive, suggesting that family processes may be different for boys and girls in relation to delinquent behavior. Therefore, given that most current theoretical models and intervention strategies are based on boys' development of delinquency, different models that explain the development of delinquency and intervention strategies may be needed for girls. Furthermore, the findings with regard to parenting styles of fathers in general and combinations of paternal and maternal parenting styles in particular, support a family system perspective in the treatment of delinquent youngsters.