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Abstract

Preoccupation of criminologists with juvenile-onset criminal careers overshadows the fact that offenders who begin their criminal careers in adulthood comprise a substantial portion of adult offender populations. Little is known about adult-onset offenders, generally, and even less about first-time adult-onset offenders. Using a large sample of adult felons on probation supervision, this study explores differences between first and repeat offenders. With respect to risk factors at intake, timing of rearrest, and frequency and nature of supervision failures over 3 years, first-time adult-onset participants exhibited statistically significant differences in relation to both repeat adult-onset and juvenile persistent offenders, with largest differences occurring in analyses involving the latter. With respect to risk factors at intake and rearrest, events in adulthood played a more dominant role among first-time adult-onset offenders compared with other groups, where criminal lifestyle factors were in greater evidence. The article concludes with a discussion of community supervision practices to prevent the progression of the first-time adult-onset offender's criminal career, social reforms to assist this group, and avenues for relevant future research.

Keywords

first-time offenders, adult-onset offending, community supervision, probation

One intriguing finding of criminological research is the discovery that many offenders begin their criminal careers in adulthood. For example, McCord's (1978) 30-year follow-up of the Cambridge Somerville Youth study revealed that 11.2% of the 367 participants

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with no juvenile records incurred convictions for serious crimes as adults, and that an additional 50.4% accrued convictions for minor offenses. Substantial proportions emerge in other research as well. Analysis by Shannon (1988) of respondents from three Racine, Wisconsin, birth cohorts who acquired criminal histories in adulthood only found 27.6% of males and 28.2% of females in the 1942 cohort who met this criterion (followed through age 33), 18.7% of males and 24.2% of females in the 1949 cohort (followed through age 26), and 15.5% of males and 14.6% of females in the 1955 cohort (followed through age 22). In their follow-up of persons born in England and Wales during selected weeks in 1953, Prime, White, Liriano, and Kinnari (2001) reported that 31% of their participants had acquired a criminal history by age 40, up from 19% at age 20, and that 33% of males had accrued a conviction by age 46. Wolfgang, Thornberry, and Figlio (1987) followed a random sample of 10% of the 1945 Philadelphia birth cohort through age 30 and discovered that slightly less than one quarter of the 975 participants committed crimes only during adulthood. In one of the longest follow-ups to date, Farrington and colleagues (2006) tracked the criminal histories of a sample of 411 8- and 9-year-old males from British schools through age 50. Of the 167 males who accrued criminal histories during this time, 22.8% acquired them after age 20.

According to some research, adult-onset offenders make up a significant proportion of adult criminal populations. For example, Tracy and Kempf-Leonard (1996) conducted a follow-up of the 27,160 participants of the 1958 Philadelphia birth cohort through age 26. Although individuals who did not begin criminal activity until they had reached adulthood made up only 6% of the cohort, they comprised 44% of its adult criminals. Similarly, Eggleston and Laub's (2002) follow-up of 732 participants from the Racine birth cohorts of 1942 and 1949 revealed that 46.4% of the adult offender population acquired official criminal histories only after reaching adulthood.

The proportion of first-time adult-onset offenders under correctional supervision also appears to be substantial. The United States Sentencing Commission (2004) reports that of the 29,749 offenders sentenced by the U.S. courts in 1992, 29.8% had no prior arrests and an additional 8.4% had prior arrests but no prior convictions. In addition, studies of older offenders note that many are without prior criminal involvement. For example, Aday (1984) observed that 42% of a sample of 94 older prison inmates had no criminal history. Brahce and Bachand (1989) found that persons without criminal histories comprised 83% of males and 95% of females in a sample of persons more than age 55 arrested in Flint, Michigan, during a 4-year period.

Individuals who begin criminal activity in adulthood are typically overlooked in the criminological literature. A taxonomy developed by Moffitt (1993) has been particularly influential in directing attention to two groups, the life-course-persistent and adolescence-limited offender. This view of the scope of criminal careers, coupled with favoritism for longitudinal over retrospective or cross-sectional designs, has helped to divert attention from examination of adult-onset offenders. Preoccupation with juvenile-onset criminality can lead researchers to limit the duration of follow-up to the end of adolescence or emphasize participants with a history of delinquency in an effort to

understand persistence, desistance, and trajectories related to criminal offending (e.g., Ferguson & Horwood, 2002; Haapanen, Britton, & Croisdale, 2007; Le Blanc & Loeber, 1998; Massoglia, 2006; Paternoster, Brame, & Farrington, 2001; Sampson & Laub, 2003). Research on “early” versus “late” onset offenders often designates an adolescent year, such as 12 or 14, as opposed to the age of majority (i.e., the age at which an individual is subject to the authority of the criminal rather than the juvenile court) or beyond, as the point of demarcation between the two groups (e.g., Carroll et al., 2006; Mazerolle, Brame, Paternoster, Piquero, & Dean, 2000).

This article contributes to what is currently a very small body of research on first-time adult-onset offenders, using a large sample of individuals under community supervision. Reliance on a community corrections cohort provides an opportunity to explore risk, needs, and situational factors surrounding the adult-onset offender's first official crime, data acquired during the probation intake process and typically unavailable from existing longitudinal studies. Use of a statewide community corrections cohort ensures a large sample of heterogeneous first-time adult-onset offenders for study, in contrast with longitudinal studies, which are often restricted to urban, male participants. Finally, there is a need to examine the nature and subsequent risks posed by first-time adult-onset offenders under community supervision if indeed they do comprise a large proportion of individuals in such settings.

A literature review summarizes prior work in two related areas: research on first offenders, including both juvenile and adult; and research on adult-onset offenders, a category that includes first-time as well as repeat offenders. This review then considers potential theories of first-time adult-onset offending and offers hypotheses for analysis. Subsequent analyses address the following questions: Apart from obvious differences in criminal histories, how are first-time adult-onset offenders distinct from repeat offenders? What is the nature and timing of risks posed by this group, relative to repeat offenders? Are risk factors for recidivism different for first-time adult-onset offenders than for repeat offenders? The article concludes with a discussion of community supervision practices to prevent the progression of the first-time adult-onset offender's criminal career, social reforms to assist this group, and avenues for relevant future research.

Literature Review

Research on First Offenders

Most attention paid to first offenders centers on their treatment by the justice system. Of particular interest have been studies of novel efforts to prevent recidivism in juvenile first offender populations (e.g., McGarrell & Hipple, 2007; Patrick & Marsh, 2005; Quinn & Van Dyke, 2004; Smith, Usinger-Lesquereux, & Evans, 1999; Sutphen, Thyer, & Kurtz, 1995; Stickle, Connell, Wilson, & Gottfredson, 2008; Wright & Mays, 1998). Attention to adult first offenders, on the other hand, typically concentrates on specific subpopulations, such as driving while intoxicated (DWI) offenders

(Cavaiola, Strohmets, & Abreo, 2007; Gould & Gould, 1992; Kernodle & Joyce, 1995; Knoebel & Ross, 1997; Wheeler & Hissong, 1988), shoplifters (Deng, 1997; LaMontagne, Boyer, Hetu, & Lacerte-Lamontagne, 2000; Ray, Solomon, Doncaster, & Mellina, 1983), female inmates (Long, Sultan, Kiefer, & Schrum, 1985), and sex offenders (Ruddijs & Timmerman, 2000; Stermac & Hall, 1989). Other research explores the nature, determinants, and/or effectiveness of punishment measures for first offenders (Fader, Harris, Jones, & Poulin, 2001; Lee, 1996; Meeker, Jesilow, & Aranda, 1992; Parisi, 1981; Tiffany, Avichai, & Peters, 1975; Vigorita, 2002; Vito & Allen, 1980; Walker, Farrington, & Tucker, 1981; Wilson & Vito, 1990). Very few studies explore how first offenders differ from chronic offenders and those that do also focus only on subpopulations (e.g., Cavaiola, Strohmets, Wolf, & Lavender, 2003; Reynolds, Kuncce, & Cope, 1991). Also rare is research leading to the identification of factors that can predict recidivism by general populations of first offenders. This search yielded just three such studies, two of which (Gavazzi, Yarcheck, Sullivan, Jones, & Khurana, 2008; Risler, Sutphen, & Shields, 2000) involve validation of risk assessment instruments using juvenile only populations.

Liberton, Silverman, and Blount (1992) completed what is perhaps the only published study of factors predicting recidivism in a general sample of first-time *adult* offenders, using a sample of 427 first-time felony offenders sentenced to probation in a Florida county during the years 1980 through 1982. During a 7-year follow-up, offenders older than 22 at age of conviction, and those with prior military experience, steady marriages, consistent employment, and financial stability at conviction were more likely to succeed on probation than participants without these characteristics.

Research on Adult-Onset Offenders

A smaller body of research has attempted to identify factors discriminating adult-onset from juvenile-onset offenders. Common to most of these efforts is the longitudinal study of participants, usually males, first observed in early childhood and then followed through some period of adulthood. Lengths of follow-up in adult years differ substantially across studies; for example, Lay, Ihle, Esser, and Schmidt (2005) conducted a follow-up only to age 25 whereas others (Eggleston & Laub, 2002; Gomez-Smith & Piquero, 2005; Sampson & Laub, 1990) followed participants into their 30s. Others have carried out even longer follow-ups; for example, Pulkkinen, Lyyra, and Kokko (2009) and Zara and Farrington (2009) tracked participants to ages 42 and 50, respectively. A second source of variation in the research is the designation of age of adult onset. Sampson and Laub's (1990) choice of age 17 and Zara and Farrington's (2009) use of age 21 are representative of options used to designate the initiation of adulthood in research on adult-onset.

In spite of these differences, the studies confirm the relevance of developmental factors in accounting for adult-onset criminality. For example, using data collected for the National Collaborative Perinatal Project to examine factors related to adult-onset offending in a sample of 987 youths born to African American mothers, Gomez-Smith

and Piquero (2005) found that adult-onset participants were most likely to have mothers who smoked. High total California Achievement Test scores decreased the odds of adult-onset criminality, relative to nonoffenders.

In their follow-up of 236 male participants from the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development, Zara and Farrington (2009) observed that correlates of adult-onset offending changed with participants' age group. Youths who were nervous, clumsy, impulsive, neglected by parents, and who exhibited lower academic potential in childhood experienced higher odds of falling into the late starter versus the nonoffender group. However, participants who were nervous as adolescents and narcissistic and erratically employed as teenagers also experienced higher odds of being late starters versus nonoffenders. Somewhat similarly, Lay, Ihle, Esser, and Schmidt's (2005) analysis of 321 children from Mannheim, Germany, linked adult-onset offending with stressful events in adolescence, including employment, living situations, and associations with peers and parents.

Using 196 male participants randomly sampled from the Jyväskylä (Finland) Longitudinal Study of Personality and Social Development, Pulkkinen et al. (2009) also produced findings comparable to Zara and Farrington's (2009). Childhood anxiety increased the odds that the participant was adult-onset versus juvenile persistent, and in adulthood, neuroticism increased the odds that the participant was an adult-onset versus nonoffender. Subsequent reanalysis of the Cambridge data by Farrington, Ttofi, and Coid (2009) led the authors to conclude that the combination of the late-starter offender's greater nervousness and neuroticism and longer access to a sheltered environment served as protective factors that delayed criminal activity until after the adolescent and teen years.

Research also substantiates the importance of events in adulthood as precipitators of adult-onset offending. Sampson and Laub (1990) reexamined data on 880 cases from Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck's matched sample of 500 delinquent and 500 nondelinquent White males. Analysis using all males found that commitment to conventional goals and job stability resulted in lower levels of deviance and arrest in the previously nondelinquent subsample. When the investigation focused only on ever married males, job instability as well as weak marital attachment predicted arrest and general deviance in both subsamples. These findings led the authors to conclude that "adult life events matter" in explaining crime and deviance over the life course, independent of prior delinquent status. Although Eggleston and Laub (2002) were unable to produce analogous results for employment in their study of two Racine, Wisconsin, birth cohorts, Zara and Farrington's (2009) analysis of the Cambridge data found that unemployment and poor home conditions in adulthood increased the odds that the participant would become an adult-onset offender.

The First-Time Adult-Onset Offender: Theoretical Considerations

To date, the research on adult-onset offending indicates that developmental, socioeconomic, and behavioral factors may play a role in discriminating between adult-onset,

juvenile persistent, adolescent-limited, and nonoffenders. Although the diversity of research measures and ages of majority may limit generalizability of findings regarding which specific childhood and adolescent factors influence adult-onset offending, it appears that individual and psychological traits developed in childhood and adolescence can have an impact many years later. In addition, some consistency emerges across a few of the studies with respect to the effects of situational factors on adult-onset offending, such as employment, marital or family relations, and living accommodations.

A focus absent from all prior research on adult-onset offending is an exploration of factors influencing the initial offense. All of the studies thus far have considered adult-onset offenders as a single group, thus missing an opportunity to explore and distinguish determinants of primary and secondary deviance in this population. Given the lengthy expanse of adulthood, limiting adult-onset offenders to a single group means aggregating adult first offenders with other offenders who, though they began their criminal activity in adulthood, may now have substantial criminal histories to their credit and may now be much more like juvenile persistent offenders than their first-time counterparts. Narrowing the focus to the first-time adult-onset offender permits us to consider the question of how we might prevent individuals who have successfully refrained from criminal activity through childhood and adolescence from ultimately succumbing to unlawful pathways in adulthood.

Depending on one's theoretical perspective, adult-onset offending may be difficult to accommodate and first-time adult-onset offending even more so. For example, Farrington (2003) acknowledges late onset as a gray area for developmental and life course criminology generally, particularly with respect to onset after 20. This is because most recognized risk factors—for example, low income, poor parenting, delinquent peers, bad neighborhoods—present themselves in childhood or adolescence. Why the potential for antisocial behavior brought about by such risk factors would lie dormant in the adult-onset offender, and what would cause them to emerge up to many years later, are puzzling questions needing to be addressed.

Krohn and Thornberry (2001) deemphasize the early- and late-starter categories, drawing attention instead to a continuous distribution of onset, in which onset may be either earlier or later, as opposed to early or late. Using an interactional perspective, they assert that “the causes of delinquency vary systematically with stages of the life course and with the success or failure with which the life course has been traversed” (p. 293). Also key to this perspective is social structure—economic advantage, family relationships, and larger social networks (e.g., peers, school, and neighborhood). For Krohn and Thornberry, later onset offenders are those whose earlier prosocial bonds fail to protect them from the adverse consequences of attempts to break free of adult authority. Although many later starters rely on accumulated social capital to overcome initial forays into delinquent activity, for others, such actions have more formidable and longer lasting negative effects that reinforce criminal pathways.

Sampson and Laub (1992) emphasize both childhood influences as well as major life events in adulthood such as school, employment, marriage, military service,

moving, and parenthood to explain involvement in crime. In support of their life course perspective, Sampson and Laub point to various findings of research on criminal careers that taken together seem paradoxical, namely, the strong association between antisocial behavior and children and adults, the fact that the majority of the antisocial children desist from such behavior before becoming adults, and the large number of criminal adults who have no criminal histories as juveniles. In the aggregate, these findings indicate that for most criminals, antisocial behavior does not exhibit stability over time; rather, stability of antisocial behavior appears only in the most extremely antisocial individuals.

Although Sampson and Laub's references to events in adulthood serve principally as explanations for desistance, other research helps to illuminate how factors such as marriage, employment, finances, and living accommodations can precipitate criminal activity in adulthood. For example, Weisburd, Waring, and Chayet (2001) studied 968 offenders processed for at least one of eight varieties of white-collar crime in seven federal judicial districts between 1976 and 1978. As many as 50% of the sample had no prior arrests other than for the instant offense. According to the researchers, low-rate white-collar offenders do not fit common criminal stereotypes. "Most lead lives that give no indication, beyond the criminal acts for which they were prosecuted, that they would have contact with the criminal justice system" (p. 58). Rather, these individuals had acted in response to an immediate crisis or lucrative criminal opportunity.

In their retrospective study of 658 male felons admitted to the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services, Horney, Osgood, and Marshall (1995) determined that changing life circumstances altered participants' odds of engaging in criminal activity, though not always in the expected direction. Substance abuse and living with a wife decreased odds of committing crime, whereas living with a girlfriend heightened them. Employment did not produce the expected relation; the odds that participants would commit a crime increased in the presence of employment, a result the authors attribute to lack of data to distinguish full- from part-time work. Other provocative work has been contributed by Cohen, Chen, Hamigami, Gordon, and McArdle (2000), who have demonstrated that such variables as career transitions and finances can have different local (in the month after measurement) and long-term effects on criminal activity.

Also consistent with an emphasis on the importance of events in adulthood is research by Kurlychek, Brame, and Bushway (2007), who studied the probability of rearrest in 670 males from the 1942 Racine birth cohort. Individuals whose last police contact occurred in the recent past experienced a higher rate of new recidivism than those whose last contact was more distant—independent of the existence of a juvenile record. They write: "Simple distinctions between those who have an official offending record and those who do not appear to be quite inadequate as a basis for future criminal activity predictions" (p. 73).

The current research explores the saliency of events in adulthood as an explanation for first-time adult-onset offending. The article tests four hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 proposes that at the time of intake, first-time adult-onset offenders will be more like repeat offenders with respect to employment difficulties, dysfunctional marital/family

relations, financial problems, and disruption in living accommodations, than with respect to factors indicative of criminal lifestyle such as alcohol and drug abuse, criminal companions, and unwillingness to change. The analysis will compare first-time adult-onset offenders with repeat adult-onset offenders as well as individuals whose criminal careers began as juveniles. It is expected that the number of criminal lifestyle factors will increase with extent of criminal history; for example, repeat adult-onset offenders will exhibit fewer of these than juvenile persistent offenders, and first offenders none at all.

Hypothesis 2 asserts that the timing of recidivism will be related to extent of prior involvement in the justice system. Consistent with Krohn and Thornberry (2001), it is expected that their greater accumulation of social capital will help first-time adult-onset offenders to resist rearrest for a longer period than repeat adult-onset offenders, who will in turn avoid rearrest for a longer period than juvenile persistent offenders. Hypothesis 3, also consistent with Krohn and Thornberry, suggests that the occurrence of supervision failure will be related to extent of criminal history, with first-time adult-onset offenders experiencing the lowest failure rates and juvenile persistent offenders the highest.

Hypothesis 4 proposes that events in adulthood—disruptions in marital or family relations, employment, finances, and living accommodations—will play a more prominent role in the prediction of rearrest for first offenders than for repeat offenders, and particularly, juvenile persistent offenders. Furthermore, it is expected that factors indicative of criminal lifestyle will exert influence on recidivism for repeat offenders, chief among them juvenile persistent offenders, but not for first-time adult-onset offenders, who are expected to have greater resiliency in this regard in the wake of their initial conviction.

Method

Sample

The sample consists of 3,598 individuals placed on felony probation in a large south central state during October 1993 and followed for 3 years. Participants of the study comprise all cases in the entire cohort of the 4,929 offenders entering felony probation during this period for which classification, criminal history, and outcome data were available. The 4,929 felony probationers were participants of a 3-year statewide classification study, for which most data collection responsibility rested with county-level probation departments. Possibly because of workload constraints, no data were recorded for 694 cases (14.1% of the sample). Very limited data collection consisting mainly of demographic characteristics occurred in an additional 636 cases (12.9% of the sample), a result of transfer to other jurisdictions, absconding, or incarceration either as a condition of the current conviction or a result of another. For these cases, both criminal history and classification data were unavailable.

Of the remaining 3,599 cases, complete criminal histories could be determined for all but one case. Thus the current study consists of 3,598 participants, or 73% of the original cohort. There were no statistically significant differences between the 3,598 participants who comprise the study sample and the 636 probationers for whom only limited data were available, with respect to either average age ($t = 0.847$, $p = .40$) or percentage Hispanic (chi-square = 0.058, $p = .81$). The study sample contained a slightly higher percentage of Blacks than did the group of 636 (28.7% vs. 25.0%), but this relation was not statistically significant ($p = .06$).

Table 1 reports the distribution of cases within each of the variables used in the multivariate analyses. Males constitute 78% of participants. Participants averaged 29.3 years of age, with a standard deviation of 10.3 years. Approximately three quarters of participants are less than 35 years of age; persons less than age 25 comprise 40.7% of the sample. The sample is 36.1% non-Hispanic White, 28.7% Black, 34% Hispanic, and 1.2% other. Roughly 30% of participants were married or cohabiting with a common law spouse and slightly greater than half (53.8%) were employed.

More than half (54.0%) of the participants entered probation for a third-degree felony; 31.1% and 14.9% were convicted of second-degree and first-degree felonies, respectively. Drug crimes (30.8%) and thefts (20.8%) make up half of the offenses for which participants received felony probation, followed by burglaries (14.9%), DWIs (9.3%), assaults (6.6%), and sex crimes (4.5%). Participants whose offenses included robberies or homicides comprised 3% of the sample. Slightly less than 2% were convicted on weapons charges. All other offenses made up 8.3% of the sample. Twenty-eight percent of the sample had experienced prior sentences to incarceration (prison, jail, or juvenile institution). Prior convictions ranged from 0 to 25, with a mean and standard deviation of 1.14 and 1.90 convictions, respectively. Prior arrests ranged from 0 to 32, with a mean of 1.91 and standard deviation of 2.9 arrests.

The most prevalent risk factor in the aggregate sample was financial difficulties at 70.2%, followed by antisocial companions at 62.6%. Use of alcohol and drugs were rated by supervising officers as factors leading to offending with respect to less than half the sample (47% and 44.8%, respectively). Relatively few offenders (6.5%) exhibited signs of mental impairment (e.g., poor motor skills, borderline or lower IQ) or sexual deviance (6.0%). Probationers fell into the latter category if their prior or instant records included sexual offenses, if they had experienced treatment for a sexual problem, or if they had volunteered information about problematic sexual conduct. Roughly 44% of probationers exhibited employment difficulties such as unsatisfactory employment or unemployment; one in three possessed academic skills deficits and almost one quarter (23.4%) experienced unstable living accommodations in the prior year. One half of offenders rationalized their behavior or reported unwillingness to change.

Although the majority of offenders met with their officers just once per month, various probationers experienced supervision conditions resulting in increased opportunities for justice system monitoring of their activities. Twenty-eight percent of the probationers were referred for outpatient substance abuse treatment. Nearly 15% were

Table 1. Distribution of Sample Characteristics (N = 3,598)

| Variable | % (n) of sample with this characteristic |
|--|--|
| Male | 78.0 (2,808) |
| Age at intake (years) | |
| <25 | 40.7 (1,466) |
| 25-34 | 31.9 (1,148) |
| 35-44 | 18.8 (676) |
| ≥45 | 8.6 (309) |
| Race/ethnicity | |
| White, non-Hispanic | 36.1 (1,300) |
| Black | 28.7 (1,032) |
| Hispanic | 34.0 (1,223) |
| Other | 1.2 (44) |
| Married | 30.9 (1,110) |
| Employed | 53.8 (1,934) |
| Graduated high school or has GED | 50.0 (1,799) |
| Academic skill deficits | 32.1 (1,155) |
| Employment history or skills problems | 43.8 (1,572) |
| Financial management problems | 70.2 (2,523) |
| Marital or family relations problems | 48.1 (1,730) |
| Antisocial companions | 62.6 (2,251) |
| Emotional stability problems | 23.2 (832) |
| Alcohol use probable factor in crime | 47.0 (1,689) |
| Drug use probable factor in crime | 44.8 (1,611) |
| Impaired mental ability | 6.5 (233) |
| Sexual deviance | 6.0 (215) |
| Multiple address changes in past year | 23.4 (843) |
| Unwilling to change or to accept responsibility | 49.6 (1,782) |
| Instant offense type | |
| Homicides | 0.9 (34) |
| Robberies | 2.1 (77) |
| Assaults | 6.6 (237) |
| Sex crimes | 4.5 (161) |
| Burglaries | 14.9 (536) |
| Thefts and fraud | 20.8 (748) |
| Drug crimes | 30.8 (1,108) |
| DWIs | 9.3 (336) |
| Weapons offenses | 1.7 (62) |
| Other crimes | 8.3 (299) |
| Level of instant offense | |
| First-degree felony | 14.9 (535) |
| Second-degree felony | 31.1 (1,113) |
| Third-degree felony | 54.0 (1,934) |
| Any prior incarceration | 28.0 (1,005) |
| Supervision conditions ^a | |
| ISP, surveillance, day reporting, or electronic monitoring | 14.7 (530) |

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

| Variable | % (n) of sample with this characteristic |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Residential placement | 7.7 (278) |
| Outpatient treatment | 28.8 (1,035) |
| Rearrested over 3-year follow-up | 43.4 (1,562) |
| Rearrest offense type | |
| Homicides | 0.7 (11) |
| Robberies | 2.1 (31) |
| Assaults | 10.4 (157) |
| Sex crimes | 2.4 (36) |
| Burglaries | 5.8 (88) |
| Thefts and fraud | 19.3 (292) |
| Drug crimes | 19.7 (298) |
| DWIs | 14.8 (224) |
| Weapons offenses | 3.3 (50) |
| Other crimes | 21.5 (330) |
| Criminal history group | |
| First offender | 38.0 (1,369) |
| Adult prior arrests only | 10.0 (359) |
| Prior convictions as an adult only | 38.6 (1,389) |
| Juvenile persistent | 13.4 (481) |

Note: DWI = driving while intoxicated; ISP = intensive supervision probation.

a. Categories are not mutually exclusive.

subjected to some form of enhanced supervision, consisting of day reporting, intensive supervision probation (caseloads limited to 40 offenders), surveillance probation (caseloads limited to 25 offenders), or electronic monitoring. About 8% were initially referred to residential settings such as a substance abuse treatment facility, intermediate sanction facility, restitution center, or boot camp.

During the course of a 3-year follow-up, more than two in every five participants (43.4%) encountered a rearrest, excluding arrests for failure to appear or other technical violation (a total of five arrests). Drug crimes, thefts and fraud, and DWIs were among the most frequent reasons for rearrest, at 19.7%, 19.3%, and 14.8% of the sample, respectively. Slightly more than one tenth of arrests were due to assaults; 5.8% of the participants were apprehended for burglaries. Roughly 5% of the sample encountered rearrests for a new sex crime, robbery, or homicide. Approximately one fifth of the rearrests were due to a wide variety of other offenses (e.g., prostitution, reckless conduct, arson, threats, and criminal mischief).

Various methodological and analytic limitations impinge on research about first offenders, not the least of which is who should fall within this designation. Strictly speaking, the "true" first offender is one with neither an official nor unofficial criminal history. Although there is some dispute among academics regarding whether the label should be applied when official history alone is taken into account (see, e.g., Elander, Rutter, Simonoff, & Pickles, 2000; McGee & Farrington, in press; Zara & Farrington, 2009), no

self-report data are available for this analysis nor would they be in the typical correctional decision-making context. Another contentious issue is whether the category of first offenders should include individuals who have prior arrests, yet no convictions, for other than the instant offense. Thus, for the purposes of this research, the first offender is defined as one who lacks any official criminal history (either arrests or convictions) other than pertaining to the instant offense. Moreover, as persons with and without prior arrests are easily distinguished in the current data, there is no reason to collapse these groups here. Ultimately the sample was disaggregated into four groups of offenders based on extent of criminal history. "First offenders" have neither prior convictions nor arrests other than for the instant offense as an adult (defined as at least age 17, the age of majority in the study site), nor any juvenile adjudications. "Adult prior arrests only" offenders encountered arrests before their current justice system involvement but accrued neither prior convictions while an adult nor adjudications as a juvenile. "Prior convictions as adult only" offenders had been convicted at least once before the current offense, but had acquired no record of juvenile adjudications. "Juvenile persistent" offenders were those whose criminal histories included juvenile adjudications for delinquent (i.e., not status) offenses.

First offenders make up 38% of the sample. Individuals whose records contained prior arrests as an adult but neither prior juvenile adjudications nor adult convictions comprised 10%. Those with prior convictions as an adult only constituted the largest group of offenders, at 38.6%. Thus, more than two thirds (71.8%) of the felony probationer cohort consisted of participants whose first adjudication occurred after they turned 17. Persons whose official criminal histories began as juveniles made up 13.4% of the sample.

Among participants with only prior arrests as an adult on their records, number of arrests ranged from 1 to 8 with a mean of 1.7 and standard deviation of 1.1 arrests. Among individuals with prior convictions as an adult but no juvenile records of delinquency, number of convictions ranged from 1 to 15, with a mean of 2.4 and standard deviation of 1.9 convictions. This group experienced prior sentences to jail or prison an average of 0.56 times, with a standard deviation of 0.50. Slightly more than half (51.5%) of persons whose official criminal histories began as juveniles had also accrued prior convictions as adults. Prior adult convictions ranged from 0 to 25, with a mean of 1.5 and standard deviation of 2.4 convictions. This group experienced an average of 0.47 sentences to jail, prison, or juvenile institutions, with a standard deviation of 0.50. No information is available regarding the frequency of juvenile adjudications. With 16.8% of first-time offenders entering probation following conviction for a first-degree felony, this group was somewhat more likely to have accrued a very serious crime for their instant offense than were participants with adult prior arrests only, prior convictions as an adult only, and juvenile persistent offenders, at 16.0%, 12.7%, and 15.2%, respectively.

On average, juvenile persistent offenders were the youngest of the four groups, at 23.8 years of age. Participants with prior convictions as an adult only were the oldest, with a mean age of 33.5 years. First-time adult-onset offenders and those with prior

arrests as an adult only fell between these two extremes, averaging 27.5 and 27.7 years, respectively. Juvenile persistent offenders were composed of a greater percentage (40.5) of White non-Hispanics, compared with first-time adult-onset (33.5), adult prior arrests only (34.3), and prior convictions as an adult only (37.7) participants. They were also least likely to be Black (23.3%), in contrast with first-time adult-onset (29.8%), adult prior arrests only (33.7%), and prior convictions as an adult only (28.1%) participants. Roughly one third of participants were Hispanic in each of the four groups, at 34.8% of first-time adult-onset, 30.1% with adult prior arrests only, 33.8% with prior convictions as an adult only, and 35.3% of juvenile persistent offenders. Juvenile persistent offenders were more likely to be male (88.8% of participants), compared with 70.6% of first-time adult-onset participants, 74.9% of participants with adult prior arrests only, and 82.4% of participants with prior convictions as an adult only.

Despite their lack of official criminal histories, 11.8% of first-time adult-onset offenders experienced some form of enhanced supervision (intensive supervision probation [ISP], day reporting, etc.) and another 3.4% were referred to residential treatment. Enhanced supervision was imposed on 14.8% of participants with adult prior arrests only, and residential treatment, on 7.8%. In contrast, 19.5% of juvenile persistent offenders received enhanced supervision, and 11.9% were referred to residential treatment. Participants with prior convictions as an adult only were more likely to be referred to outpatient treatment than other participants, at 33.5% of offenders, compared with 23.2% of first-time adult-onset, 28.1% with adult prior arrests only, and 31.2% of juvenile persistent offenders.

Measures

Dependent variables differ according to the hypothesis being tested. For Hypothesis 1, an examination of factors discriminating first offenders from those with more extensive criminal histories, the dependent variable is extent of criminal history as defined above. For Hypothesis 2, an assessment of the impact of extent of criminal history on the timing of recidivism, the dependent variable is number of days to rearrest. For Hypothesis 3, which seeks to establish a relation between occurrence of negative supervision outcomes and criminal history group, outcome measures include rearrest, revocation, and specific technical rules violations. For Hypothesis 4, an assessment of the predictors of new recidivism, the dependent variable is whether the participant was rearrested by the end of the 3-year follow-up period.

This study examines the nature and behaviors of first-time adult-onset offenders on probation—thus independent variables are limited to those measures commonly and uniformly available at the time of intake and supervision. No developmental factors are included among these items, which comprise three categories of risk factors: personal attributes, criminal lifestyle characteristics, and events in adulthood. Individual risk factors include mental impairment, academic skills deficits, and deviant sexuality. Criminal lifestyle factors include deviant companions, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, and failure to accept responsibility or resistance to change. Events in adulthood include

recent or ongoing disruptions in marital or family relations, employment problems (unemployed or underemployed), financial difficulties, and recent address changes (two or more in the last year). Demographic measures include age (converted to a categorical variable with "younger than 25" as the reference group), sex, whether the participant is Black, and whether the participant is Hispanic. To account for level of justice system intervention, a status that could exert influence on a participant's likelihood of rearrest, measures also included three categories of "intrusive" supervision conditions: enhanced supervision (day reporting, ISP, surveillance probation, or electronic monitoring), outpatient substance abuse treatment, and residential placement. Independent variables were coded 1 if the participant possessed the characteristic in question, and 0 if the attribute was absent. No problematic correlations between independent variables were detected.

Table 2 presents operational definitions and coding schema for all measures used in the analyses. All data except for arrests were collected from classification information on record in individual case files maintained by the participants' probation officers. Arrest data were acquired from the state's criminal history information system, which includes arrest incidents from other states.

Analytic Methods

To explore intergroup differences at the time of intake (Hypothesis 1), risk factors and demographic characteristics were regressed on extent of criminal history, using a series of four multivariate logistic regressions. Probation conditions were not among the exogenous variables included in this regression as the offenders were at the start of their supervision. The dependent variable in each regression consisted of two values, first offenders (coded as 1) and one other comparison group (adult arrests only, convictions as an adult only, or juvenile persistent offenders; coded as 0). Each regression examines the role played by particular risk and demographic variables in discriminating between first offenders and the comparison group in question. Odds ratios approximating the value of 1 indicate similarities between groups; odds ratios greater than 1 point to characteristics that increase the probability that the participant is a first offender and those less than 1, to features that decrease the likelihood. Of particular interest is the role played by events in adulthood relative to other risk factors; it is anticipated that odds ratios for marital or family relations, employment, financial difficulties, and address changes will be close to 1 or greater (i.e., first offenders should have similar or greater likelihood of dysfunction in these areas compared to offenders with more extensive criminal histories). At the same time, factors indicative of criminal lifestyles are expected to yield lower odds that the participant is a first offender.

Several bivariate analyses explore timing of supervision failure across the various criminal history groups (Hypothesis 2). An initial Kaplan-Meier analysis probes variation in survival time, measured as days to rearrest. Subsequent Kaplan-Meier analyses reexamine variation in survival time, controlling for supervision conditions. Using a larger set of outcomes, including revocation and various technical violations, a

Table 2. Description of Measures and Coding Used in the Multivariate Analyses

| Variable | Description |
|--|---|
| Academic skills | Coded 1 if participant exhibited low skill level (e.g., reading, writing, verbal) causing at least some adjustment problems; others coded 0 |
| Employment history | Coded 1 if participant had unsatisfactory (e.g., illegal) employment, was unemployed, or unemployable; others coded 0 |
| Financial management | Coded 1 if participant exhibited situational or severe difficulties meeting financial obligations, including participants with forgery or bad checks as a present offense and participants with gambling addictions; others coded 0 |
| Marital or family relations | Coded 1 if participant exhibited at least some disorganization or stress with respect to marital or family relationships; others coded 0 |
| Deviant companions | Coded 1 if participant had antisocial companions with at least occasional negative results or drug-abusing companions or if participant had neither prosocial friends nor perceived a need for any; others coded 0 |
| Emotional stability | Coded 1 if participant's symptoms (e.g., depression, chronic anxiety, impulsivity, anger) limited adequate functioning; others coded 0 |
| Alcohol abuse | Coded 1 if officer following assessment of alcohol usage problems perceived participant's use of alcohol to be related to participant's criminal activity; coded 0 in the absence of alcohol-related offenses or use of alcohol during offense(s) |
| Drug abuse | Coded 1 if officer following assessment of drug usage problems perceived participant's use of drugs to be related to participant's criminal activity; coded 0 in the absence of drug-related offenses or use of drugs during offense(s) |
| Mental impairment | Coded 1 if participant exhibited problems such as poor motor skills, borderline or lower IQ; others coded 0 |
| Sexual deviance | Coded 1 if participant's prior or instant records included sexual offenses, if participant had experienced treatment for a sexual problem, or if participant volunteered information about problematic sexual conduct; others coded 0 |
| Recent address changes | Coded 1 if participant experienced two or more address changes in the past 12 months; others coded 0 |
| Unwilling to change or accept responsibility | Coded 1 if participant was unwilling to accept responsibility for the offense, rationalized his or her behavior, or displayed lack of motivation to change; others coded 0 |
| Male | Coded 1 if participant was a male and 0 if female |
| Age (years) | |
| <25 | This category served as the reference group for all other age categories |
| 25-34 | Coded 1 if participant was between the ages of 25 and 34, inclusive; others coded 0 |
| 35-44 | Coded 1 if participant was between the ages of 35 and 44, inclusive; others coded 0 |
| ≥45 | Coded 1 if participant was at least 45; others coded 0 |
| Black | Coded 1 if participant was Black; others coded 0 |
| Hispanic | Coded 1 if participant was Hispanic; others coded 0 |

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

| Variable | Description |
|-----------------------|--|
| Enhanced supervision | Coded 1 if any of the following conditions were imposed on the participant: day reporting, ISP, surveillance probation, electronic monitoring; others coded 0 |
| Residential placement | Coded 1 if any of the following conditions were imposed on the participant: substance abuse treatment facility, intermediate sanction facility, restitution center, or boot camp; others coded 0 |
| Outpatient treatment | Coded 1 if outpatient substance abuse treatment was imposed on the participant; others coded 0 |
| Rearrest | Coded 1 if participant rearrested during 3-year follow-up (excludes arrests for failure to appear, technical violation, or driving while license suspended); others coded 0 |

Note: ISP = intensive supervision probation.

contingency table displays the relation between occurrence of supervision failure and extent of criminal history (Hypothesis 3).

To examine whether different factors predict recidivism for each of the criminal history groups (Hypothesis 4), separate multivariate logistic regressions were carried out on rearrest for each of the four categories of offenders. Of interest, again, is the influence of events in adulthood relative to other risk factors. This analysis includes controls for supervision conditions, because these are expected to increase the odds that a participant would be rearrested. After controlling for supervision conditions, it is anticipated that dysfunctional marital or family relations, employment problems, financial difficulties, and address changes will heighten the odds that first offenders will be rearrested, relative to offenders with more extensive criminal histories. With respect to criminal history groups other than first offenders, it is expected that factors indicative of criminal lifestyles will increase odds of rearrest in addition to events in adulthood. In all logistic regressions on rearrest, supervision conditions were entered first as one block, followed by risk factors and demographic variables in the second and third blocks, respectively, to help isolate their effects on the dependent variable.

Results

Hypothesis 1: Differences at Intake

Table 3 reports results of four logistic regression analyses of risk factors and demographic characteristics on extent of criminal history. As expected, first offenders were most easily distinguished from juvenile persistent participants, with 14 of 18 variables emerging as statistically significant predictors of group membership, followed by offenders with prior convictions as adults only, with 10 statistically significant predictors. They were most similar to offenders with adult prior arrests only, with just three

Table 3. Logistic Regression Analysis of Risk Factors and Demographic Characteristics on Extent of Criminal History

| Variable | First offenders compared with | | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|------------|---|------------|--|------------|
| | All other offenders | | Offenders with adult prior arrests only | | Offenders with prior convictions as adult only | |
| | B (SE) | Odds ratio | B (SE) | Odds ratio | B (SE) | Odds ratio |
| Block 1: risk/needs | | | | | | |
| Academic skills | -0.052 (0.091) | 0.949 | 0.104 (0.148) | 1.110 | 0.108 (0.109) | 1.114 |
| Employment history | -0.256 (0.086) | 0.774** | -0.033 (0.139) | 0.967 | -0.252 (0.101) | 0.777* |
| Financial management | -0.062 (0.091) | 0.940 | -0.039 (0.147) | 0.962 | -0.036 (0.106) | 0.964 |
| Marital or family relations | -0.120 (0.085) | 0.887 | -0.285 (0.136) | 0.752* | 0.001 (0.099) | 1.001 |
| Deviant companions | -0.295 (0.088) | 0.745*** | -0.353 (0.146) | 0.702* | -0.213 (0.102) | 0.808* |
| Emotional stability | -0.281 (0.106) | 0.755** | -0.120 (0.172) | 0.887 | -0.210 (0.124) | 0.811 |
| Alcohol abuse | -0.993 (0.082) | 0.370*** | -0.182 (0.139) | 0.834 | -1.300 (0.094) | 0.272*** |
| Drug abuse | -0.152 (0.081) | 0.859 | -0.209 (0.137) | 0.812 | -0.118 (0.096) | 0.888 |
| Mental impairment | -0.126 (0.176) | 0.881 | -0.205 (0.271) | 0.815 | -0.185 (0.206) | 0.831 |
| Sexual deviance | 0.564 (0.165) | 1.758*** | 0.057 (0.267) | 1.058 | 0.648 (0.195) | 1.912*** |
| Recent address changes | -0.292 (0.094) | 0.747*** | -0.355 (0.144) | 0.701* | -0.266 (0.112) | 0.766* |
| Unwilling to change or accept responsibility | -0.284 (0.080) | 0.753*** | -0.150 (0.130) | 0.861 | -0.290 (0.095) | 0.748** |
| Block 2: demographic characteristics | | | | | | |
| Male | -0.621 (0.094) | 0.537*** | -0.230 (0.149) | 0.794 | -0.616 (0.112) | 0.540*** |
| Age (years) | | | | | | |
| <25 (reference group) | | | | | | |
| 25-34 | -0.599 (0.093) | 0.549*** | -0.135 (0.150) | 0.874 | -1.245 (0.110) | 0.288*** |
| 35-44 | -1.103 (0.116) | 0.332*** | -0.353 (0.193) | 0.703 | -1.904 (0.132) | 0.149*** |
| ≥45 | -0.887 (0.149) | 0.412*** | -0.100 (0.262) | 0.905 | -1.661 (0.166) | 0.190*** |
| Black | 0.121 (0.096) | 1.129 | -0.065 (0.151) | 0.937 | 0.054 (0.114) | 1.055 |
| Hispanic | 0.219 (0.094) | 1.245* | 0.131 (0.155) | 1.140 | 0.190 (0.112) | 1.209 |
| Constant | 1.461 | | 2.262 | | 2.445 | |
| Model chi-square | 593.67 (p < .001) | | 57.88 (p < .001) | | 752.51 (p < .001) | |
| No. of cases ^a | 3,589 | | 1,725 | | 2,751 | |
| | | | | | 384.32 (p < .001) | |
| | | | | | 1,844 | |

a. Following listwise deletion.

*p ≤ .05. **p ≤ .01. ***p ≤ .001 (Wald statistic).

statistically significant variables distinguishing the two groups. In an analysis differentiating first offenders from all other offenders, 12 variables exhibited a statistically significant relationship with criminal history group.

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, Table 3 reveals that the absence of criminal lifestyle factors differentiated first offenders from other groups. That is, for most risk factors included in the study, having the characteristic lowered the odds that the participant was a first offender. For example, perusal of the last column of Table 3 reveals that persons with deviant companions or alcohol abuse experienced half the odds of being a first versus a juvenile persistent offender compared with individuals who possessed these characteristics. Participants with drug abuse experienced roughly two thirds the odds of being a first versus a juvenile persistent offender.

In addition, the number of statistically significant criminal lifestyle factors differentiating first offenders from other groups increased by extent of criminal history, consistent with expectation. In comparison with participants with adult arrests only, the difference was one factor (deviant companions); in comparison with participants with prior convictions as an adult only, the difference was three factors (deviant companions, alcohol abuse, and unwillingness to change); and in comparison with juvenile persistent offenders, the difference was four factors (all of the above in addition to drug abuse). Also consistent with Hypothesis 1, neither financial problems nor marital or family relations help to distinguish first offenders from juvenile persistent offenders. As it would be unlikely for individuals with long-term criminal involvement to exhibit positive experiences in these areas, similarity with first offenders was expected.

Unexpected results appear for other adult events variables, namely, employment and recent address changes. Poor employment is a statistically significant predictor of criminal history group in analyses involving juvenile persistent offenders as well as those with prior convictions as an adult only, but having this characteristic only lowers the odds that the participant is a first offender. For all criminal history pairs, recent address changes reduced the odds that the participant was a first offender.

Variation between groups can be attributed to other variables as well. Older, Black, and Hispanic participants experienced higher odds of being a first offender than a juvenile persistent offender, whereas being male reduced the odds of being a first offender to 4 in 10. However, race and ethnicity do not help to distinguish first offenders from other adult-onset groups. Being older greatly reduced a participant's likelihood of having first offender status in a comparison with offenders with prior convictions as an adult only but not in a comparison with individuals whose criminal histories included only prior arrests as an adult. Finally, sexual deviance and emotional stability are useful in distinguishing the first offender. Sexual deviance increased the odds of being a first versus a juvenile persistent offender by 1.8 and emotional instability reduced the odds of being a first versus a juvenile persistent offender by approximately 0.5.

Hypothesis 2: Timing of Supervision Failure

Two analyses explore group differences with respect to time elapsed until supervision outcomes. Figure 1 depicts survival curves for rearrest for each of the four

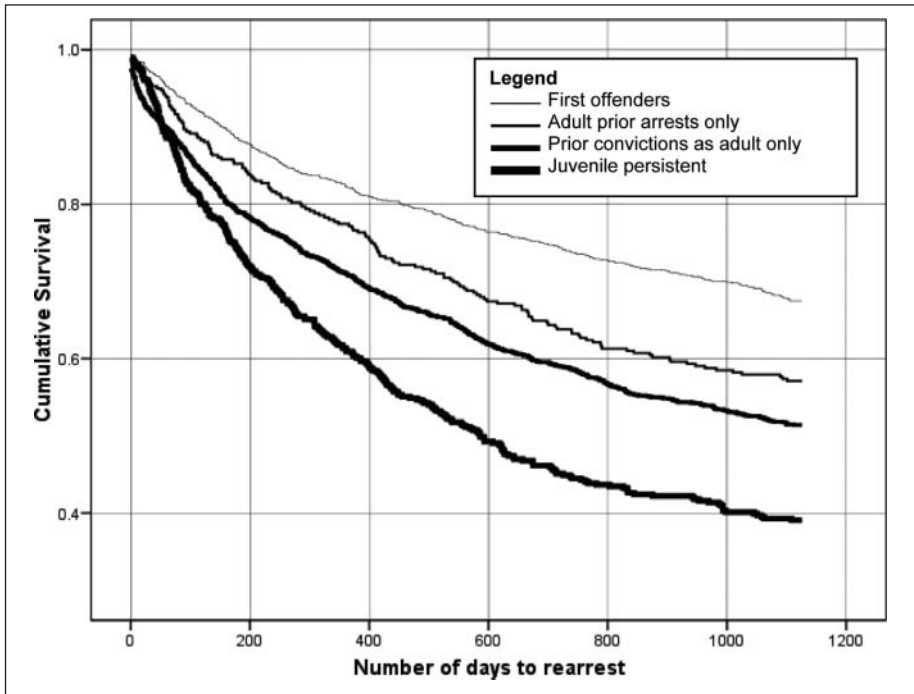


Figure 1. Cumulative proportion of probationers surviving more than 3 years, by extent of criminal history ($N = 3,598$)

Note: Generalized Wilcoxon statistic = 158.90 ($p < .001$)

criminal history groups. Number of days until rearrest (or censorship) was significantly related to extent of criminal history (Wilcoxon statistic = 158.90, $p < .001$) and in the expected direction, substantiating Hypothesis 2. Average survival time for first offenders was 891 days, compared with 804 for those with arrests as an adult only, 746 days for offenders with convictions as an adult only, and 633 days for juvenile persistent offenders.

In a more rigorous test of Hypothesis 2, Table 4 reports average survival time to rearrest and Generalized Wilcoxon statistics for each of the four criminal history groups, controlling for supervision conditions that could have an adverse impact on outcome. Not unexpectedly, offenders with no conditions survived longer than offenders with conditions, independent of criminal history group. In addition, the relation between number of days to rearrest and criminal history was most pronounced, statistically significant, and in the expected direction for both offenders with no conditions and those with any condition (i.e., either enhanced supervision, residential placement, or outpatient treatment). However, with respect to the specific conditions of residential placements and enhanced supervision, first offenders' number of days to rearrest approximated (787 vs. 786 days) or was slightly shorter (832 vs. 839 days) than that

Table 4. Survival Times for Four Criminal History Groups, Controlling for Conditions of Supervision

| Supervision condition | No. of cases | First offenders | Days to rearrest | | | | Generalized Wilcoxon |
|------------------------|--------------|-----------------|---|--|-------------------------------|--|----------------------|
| | | | Offenders with adult prior arrests only | Offenders with prior convictions as adult only | Juvenile persistent offenders | | |
| No conditions | 2,113 | 907.6 | 833.1 | 782.9 | 668.4 | | 85.54* |
| Enhanced supervision | 530 | 832.3 | 838.6 | 717.1 | 583.3 | | 22.98* |
| Residential placements | 278 | 786.7 | 785.5 | 629.7 | 639.9 | | 5.72 |
| Outpatient treatment | 1,035 | 885.0 | 723.3 | 740.8 | 595.3 | | 44.71* |
| Any condition | 1,485 | 856.5 | 762.8 | 706.4 | 738.5 | | 56.94* |

Note: No conditions: no enhanced supervision, outpatient treatment, or residential placements. Enhanced supervision: day reporting, electronic monitoring, intensive supervision probation, or surveillance probation. Residential placement: substance abuse treatment facility, intermediate sanction facility, restitution center, boot camp, etc. Outpatient treatment: substance abuse treatment on an outpatient basis. Any condition: enhanced supervision, residential placement, or outpatient treatment.

* $p \leq .001$.

observed for offenders with adult prior arrests only. With respect to outpatient treatment, offenders with prior convictions as an adult only survived slightly longer than probationers with adult prior arrests only (741 vs. 723 days). These findings highlight the merit of controlling for supervision conditions in a multivariate analysis of factors leading to rearrest.

Hypothesis 3: Occurrence and Nature of Supervision Failure

Table 5 summarizes the distribution of negative case outcomes by extent of criminal history, including rearrest and revocation along with each of nine rules (i.e., "technical") violations. The table has several interesting features. First, with respect to all but the most infrequent outcomes studied, the relation between outcome and offender type is in the expected direction and statistically significant, in support of Hypothesis 3. That is, first offenders exhibited the lowest rates, followed by participants with adult prior arrests only, then participants with convictions as an adult only, and finally, juvenile persistent offenders. Second, although first offenders have lower rates of recidivism than participants with more extensive criminal histories, their rate of rearrest, at roughly one in every three offenders, is considerable. Third, for most outcomes, participants whose criminal histories included prior arrests as an adult only behaved more like participants with prior convictions as an adult only than they resembled first offenders. Fourth, the most frequent outcomes for any one group were the same for any other group. That is, participants were more likely to be rearrested, experience revocation,

Table 5. Distribution of Supervision Outcomes, by Extent of Criminal History

| Violation type | Percentage of offenders who experienced this outcome | | | | Chi-square |
|---|--|---|--|--|------------|
| | First offenders (<i>n</i> = 1,369) | Adult prior arrests only (<i>n</i> = 359) | Prior convictions as adult only (<i>n</i> = 1,389) | Juvenile persistent (<i>n</i> = 481) | |
| Arrest for new law violation, 3-year follow-up | 32.4 | 42.6 | 48.5 | 60.9 | 142.51*** |
| Revocation | 16.5 | 22.3 | 25.6 | 45.3 | 162.11*** |
| Absconding | 11.4 | 16.4 | 15.4 | 17.9 | 17.16*** |
| MTR for failure to pay probation fees | 22.1 | 27.3 | 32.6 | 41.0 | 74.40*** |
| MTR for failure to report | 21.0 | 27.9 | 29.7 | 38.5 | 61.28*** |
| MTR for new drug use | 9.3 | 15.3 | 21.4 | 24.5 | 97.11*** |
| MTR for failure to attend treatment | 4.6 | 12.0 | 12.2 | 16.8 | 79.15*** |
| MTR for refusal to take drug test | 0.7 | 1.4 | 1.3 | 2.1 | 6.91 |
| MTR for bad associations | 1.6 | 0.8 | 1.2 | 2.9 | 8.61* |
| MTR for bad employment | 2.7 | 3.9 | 2.7 | 6.0 | 14.63** |
| MTR for failure to comply with other conditions | 6.9 | 9.2 | 9.4 | 14.8 | 26.34*** |

Note: MTR = motion to revoke filed.

p* ≤ .05. *p* ≤ .01. ****p* ≤ .001.

fail to report, or fail to pay probation fees than they were to engage in any other negative outcome, no matter what criminal history group they belonged to.

Hypothesis 4: Risk Factors for Rearrest

Table 6 reports the outcomes of logistic regression analyses of supervision conditions, risk factors, and demographic characteristics on rearrest for offenders within each of the four criminal history groups. By entering supervision conditions in the first block, it is possible to assess the impact of risk and other factors on rearrest after taking into account the impact that heightened justice system surveillance may be expected to have on case outcome. It is anticipated that analyses involving adult-onset offenders only, and particularly first-time adult-onset offenders, will produce different predictors of rearrest than for juvenile persistent offenders.

Table 6. Logistic Regression Analyses of Risk Factors and Demographic Characteristics on Rearrest, by Extent of Criminal History

| Variable | First offenders | | | Offenders with adult prior arrests only | | | Offenders with prior convictions as adult only | | | Juvenile persistent offenders | | |
|--|-----------------|------------|--|---|------------|--|--|------------|--|-------------------------------|------------|--|
| | B (SE) | Odds ratio | | B (SE) | Odds ratio | | B (SE) | Odds ratio | | B (SE) | Odds ratio | |
| Block 1: Supervision conditions | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Enhanced supervision | 0.059 (0.193) | 1.061 | | -0.347 (0.341) | 0.707 | | 0.217 (0.155) | 1.242 | | 0.057 (0.262) | 1.058 | |
| Residential placement | 0.133 (0.324) | 1.143 | | -0.584 (0.475) | 0.558 | | 0.155 (0.193) | 1.168 | | -0.033 (0.325) | 0.967 | |
| Outpatient treatment | 0.196 (0.161) | 1.217 | | 0.540 (0.279) | 1.716* | | -0.105 (0.123) | 0.901 | | 0.213 (0.236) | 1.237 | |
| Block 2: Risk or needs | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Academic skills | -0.063 (0.151) | 0.939 | | 0.512 (0.286) | 1.669 | | -0.119 (0.136) | 0.888 | | -0.065 (0.226) | 0.937 | |
| Employment history | 0.346 (0.140) | 1.413** | | 0.084 (0.280) | 1.088 | | 0.267 (0.126) | 1.306* | | 0.305 (0.223) | 1.356 | |
| Financial management | -0.070 (0.146) | 0.932 | | 0.024 (0.294) | 1.024 | | 0.025 (0.140) | 1.026 | | 0.092 (0.265) | 1.096 | |
| Marital or family relations | 0.346 (0.140) | 1.414** | | 0.041 (0.278) | 1.042 | | 0.009 (0.127) | 1.009 | | 0.060 (0.234) | 1.062 | |
| Deviant companions | 0.117 (0.143) | 1.124 | | 0.439 (0.286) | 1.551 | | 0.034 (0.130) | 1.034 | | 0.260 (0.281) | 1.297 | |
| Emotional stability | 0.050 (0.194) | 1.051 | | 0.522 (0.336) | 1.685 | | 0.075 (0.143) | 1.078 | | 0.357 (0.252) | 1.429 | |
| Alcohol abuse | 0.004 (0.146) | 1.004 | | -0.174 (0.280) | 0.841 | | 0.326 (0.128) | 1.385** | | 0.448 (0.228) | 1.566* | |
| Drug abuse | 0.138 (0.143) | 1.148 | | 0.371 (0.273) | 1.450 | | 0.068 (0.119) | 1.070 | | -0.245 (0.220) | 0.783 | |
| Mental impairment | 0.068 (0.316) | 1.070 | | -0.639 (0.502) | 0.528 | | 0.489 (0.238) | 1.630* | | 0.631 (0.406) | 1.879 | |
| Sexual deviance | -0.710 (0.327) | 0.492* | | -0.058 (0.522) | 0.944 | | -0.246 (0.254) | 0.782 | | -0.404 (0.487) | 0.668 | |
| Recent address changes | 0.153 (0.157) | 1.166 | | -0.113 (0.283) | 0.893 | | 0.070 (0.137) | 1.072 | | 0.074 (0.223) | 1.077 | |
| Unwilling to change or accept responsibility | -0.137 (0.135) | 0.872 | | 0.092 (0.254) | 1.096 | | 0.318 (0.119) | 1.375** | | 0.255 (0.218) | 1.290 | |

(continued)

Table 6. (continued)

| Variable | First offenders | | Offenders with adult prior arrests only | | Offenders with prior convictions as adult only | | Juvenile persistent offenders | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|------------|---|------------|--|------------|-------------------------------|------------|
| | B (SE) | Odds ratio | B (SE) | Odds ratio | B (SE) | Odds ratio | B (SE) | Odds ratio |
| Block 3: Demographic characteristics | | | | | | | | |
| Male | 0.774 (0.159) | 2.169*** | 1.047 (0.316) | 2.850*** | 0.286 (0.154) | 1.331 | 0.246 (0.327) | 1.280 |
| Age (years) | | | | | | | | |
| <25 (reference group) | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| 25-34 | -0.666 (0.150) | 0.514*** | -0.422 (0.298) | 0.656 | -0.336 (0.158) | 0.715* | -0.310 (0.264) | 0.734 |
| 35-44 | -1.480 (0.253) | 0.228*** | -0.843 (0.378) | 0.431* | -0.655 (0.168) | 0.519*** | -1.028 (0.384) | 0.358** |
| ≥45 | -1.354 (0.320) | 0.258*** | -1.751 (0.632) | 0.174** | -0.831 (0.215) | 0.436*** | -0.879 (0.540) | 0.408 |
| Black | 0.395 (0.159) | 1.485** | 0.400 (0.296) | 1.492 | 0.283 (0.145) | 1.327* | 0.670 (0.281) | 1.954** |
| Hispanic | 0.071 (0.157) | 1.074 | 0.397 (0.313) | 1.487 | -0.149 (0.142) | 0.861 | 0.154 (0.235) | 1.167 |
| Constant | -1.393 | | -1.813 | | -0.529 | | -0.763 | |
| Model chi-square | 170.33 (p < .001) | | 54.60 (p < .001) | | 85.43 | | 44.98 | |
| Correct predictions | 70.1% | | 65.7% | | 60.1% | | 65.5% | |
| No. of cases ^a | 1,366 | | 359 | | 1,385 | | 478 | |

a. Following listwise deletion.

*p ≤ .05. **p ≤ .01. ***p ≤ .001 (Wald statistic).

According to Table 6, none of the three categories of supervision conditions heightened odds of rearrest for any of the groups, with the exception of outpatient treatment, which increased the chances of rearrest by 1.72 among offenders with prior arrests as an adult only. Few risk factors distinguish persons who were rearrested from those who were not, no matter which criminal history group is under consideration. A single risk variable—alcohol abuse—distinguishes recidivists from nonrecidivists in the juvenile persistent population. Among persons with prior convictions as an adult only, recidivists are distinguished from nonrecidivists on the basis of employment history, alcohol abuse, mental impairment, and willingness to change. Among offenders with adult prior arrests only, rearrested individuals are indistinguishable from those who avoided rearrest on the basis of risk factors alone.

Among first-time adult-onset offenders, and in support of Hypothesis 4, the employment and marital or family relations variables exhibit statistically significant relations with rearrest. Participants with employment problems experience 1.41 times the odds of being rearrested compared with those who have satisfactory employment situations. The same odds (1.41) attach to individuals with dysfunctional marital or family relations. However, contrary to Hypothesis 4, persons with financial difficulties or recent address changes are no more likely to be rearrested than persons who do not have these problems. More pronounced than the effects of risk factors on rearrest is the influence of the participant's age—the older the offender, the less likely a rearrest, no matter which criminal history group the participant falls into. The effect of age is strongest for first offenders, where odds of rearrest for individuals aged 35 and older are roughly 0.25 the odds faced by participants younger than 25. Being male greatly increased the odds of rearrest among both first offenders (2.17) and offenders with adult prior arrests only (2.85), but it had no impact on either of the remaining groups. Being Black nearly doubled the odds of rearrest (1.95) for the juvenile persistent group. This status also significantly increased the odds of rearrest for first-time adult-onset offenders (1.49) and those with prior convictions as an adult only (1.32). Finally, sexual deviance reduced the odds of rearrest in the first offender group by one half but had no statistically significant impact for any other group.

Noteworthy is the relative accuracy of the model for first offenders. The model predicted rearrest status accurately for roughly 70% of cases. This exceeds the percentage of cases correctly predicted for participants with adult prior arrests only (65.7%), prior convictions as an adult only (60.1%), and juvenile persistent offenders (65.5%). Moreover, it surpasses the percentage of correctly predicted cases for an analysis using all participants combined. In that model (table not shown), just 62.8% of cases were accurately predicted, even though 11 of the independent variables exhibited statistically significant relations with rearrest.

Discussion and Conclusions

This work extends knowledge about a group of individuals that has received little attention by criminologists. First-time adult-onset offenders comprised a substantial

proportion of the felony probation population in the sample analyzed here. With a recidivism rate of one in three, they generated many new arrests. At intake, they were very distinct from persistent juvenile offenders for their lack of deviant lifestyle and antisocial personal traits but more alike in ways (finances and relationships) that corroborate the role played by events in adulthood as precipitators of crime. Additional confirmation of the importance of situational factors in adulthood emerged in the analysis of recidivism during a 3-year follow-up. These findings reinforce research by Sampson and Laub (1990) demonstrating the utility of attachments to work and family in explaining variation in criminal behavior over the life course. More specifically, the study underscores the value of events in adulthood for explaining onset of, as opposed to merely desistance from, criminal behavior in adulthood.

In addition, the disaggregation of adult-onset offenders into three subsets based on extent of criminal history and subsequent comparisons with juvenile persistent participants permitted a unique examination and confirmation of differences in timing, incidence, and nature of rearrest and other supervision failures across the four groups—findings that are consistent with the interactional life course theory proposed by Krohn and Thornberry (2001). The research also uncovered differences in the number and type of risk factors for each subset, both at intake and after 3 years. The incorporation of rigorous controls for supervision intensity—all too infrequent in much community corrections research—rules out the possibility that the study's findings are due to variation in opportunities for observation of negative outcomes.

The results have several implications for community supervision of the first-time adult-onset offender. First, there is no compelling evidence for singling out offenders for treatment solely on the basis of first offender status. The rearrest rate for first-time adult-onset offenders, though not insignificant, was roughly half that of juvenile persistent offenders and lower than the rate for either of the repeat adult-onset groups. Application of the risk principle (Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990) precludes distribution of treatment resources to this group on the basis of first offender status alone. Rather, the research indicates that among first offenders, recidivism risk varied widely according to age. Roughly two thirds of persons rearrested in this group were less than 25 years old and less than 8% were aged 35 years or older. This finding suggests that agencies determined to focus on first offenders would be better off targeting younger adult first offenders for allocation of treatment resources, versus first-time adult-onset offenders, generally.

Second, from the standpoint of resource allocation, first-time adult-onset offenders present a window of opportunity that may be open only briefly. As Table 3 indicates, with the accrual of additional arrests and convictions comes an increase in characteristics indicative of commitment to a criminal lifestyle. Compared to offenders with adult prior arrests only, first-time adult-onset offenders are significantly less likely to have deviant companions. Compared with offenders with prior convictions as an adult only, the set of statistically significant criminal lifestyle differences expands to include alcohol abuse and unwillingness to change or accept responsibility. Simply put, more experienced offenders present a greater number of treatment needs and possibly greater resistance to correctional interventions.

Third, according to Table 6, employment problems and difficulties with marital or family relations appear to influence the recidivism of first-time adult-onset offenders. This finding underscores the important role played by events in adulthood in the success or failure of this group. In the interest of preventing secondary deviance, the results suggest the need for prompt referrals (i.e., at the time of probation intake) to services aimed at restoring the first-time adult-onset offender's social and economic stability.

Given an already lengthy and diverse record of efforts to rehabilitate offenders, a recommendation to establish or expand programs that prepare offenders to be more viable employees and which strengthen their marriages and families may not seem particularly novel or essential. In fact, neither of these interventions has been implemented on a scale that can be expected to have a positive impact on offender reintegration. Although the need to step up attention to the capabilities of family networks is a common recommendation in contemporary examinations of prisoner reentry (e.g., Clear, 2007; Petersilia, 2003; Travis, 2004), it is no less relevant for offenders on probation supervision. None of the participants in this study received a referral to family counseling as a condition of probation. Furthermore, of the approximately 30 studies on first-time offenders cited earlier in this article, *only one*—the work by McGarrell and Hipple (2007)—considered the impact of family intervention on recidivism.

Similarly, although much interest regarding barriers to offender employment also centers on prison reentry (e.g., Holzer, Raphael, & Stoll, 2003; Jacobs, McGahey, & Minion, 1984; Rakis, 2005), efforts to improve the employment opportunities and skills of individuals on probation fall far short of what is needed. Erratic use and limited availability of employment programs are starkly evident in the current sample. Though roughly 46% of the sample reported being unemployed at intake, just 11.5% of probationers were referred to an employment program. Moreover, of the individuals who did receive a referral to an employment program, just 64% were rated by their officers as having either unsatisfactory employment history or skills.

A crucial challenge is how to infuse community corrections with greater offender employment resources at a time when public sentiment for this group is least sympathetic. Given a national joblessness rate that is at its highest in more than 60 years and an unprecedented migration of former members of the middle class to public assistance (Goodman, 2010), approval for new public funding to bolster the career potential of persons with recent criminal histories could be difficult to achieve. More realistic solutions include redirecting corrections resources from punishment and surveillance-centered supervision practices and making better use of existing offender employment programs and services. Probation departments already allocate substantial resources to heightened supervision; in the current study, roughly 15% of first-time adult-onset offenders were subjected to some form of enhanced supervision or residential placement. Diversion of funds now used to finance these practices could permit greater allocations to in-house or nonprofit offender employment programs. In addition, as stated above, not all of the probationers who were referred to an employment program demonstrated a need for such during intake, indicating that more judicious use of program referrals is possible.

Community supervision officers and others already involved in efforts to secure employment for offenders should also take advantage of opportunities to develop or update skills required to attain more successful outcomes for their clients. For example, using the Offender Workforce Development Specialist Partnership Training curriculum developed by the National Institute of Corrections, trainees learn skills to better assess offenders' workforce preferences and capabilities, strategies for helping offenders to transition to and retain employment, and tactics for building partnerships with potential employers (see, e.g., National Institute of Corrections, 2007). Finally, efforts by probation agencies or their liaisons to heighten employer awareness of the characteristics of the first-time adult-onset offender, such as their situational (vs. life-style) factors in offending and lower rates of rearrest and other misconduct, could ultimately increase private employers' willingness to take risks with this group.

A second challenge is how to restore the probationer's family and marital relationships while also reducing recidivism. The Bodega Model, a project of the Vera Institute of Justice, is an example of a program that achieves both objectives (Shapiro & Schwarz, 2001; Sullivan, Mino, Nelson, & Pope, 2002). Originally a social services program serving drug addicts and their families in New York City, the Bodega Model replaces the traditional offender-based treatment focus with one that emphasizes the strengthening of family support systems, beginning with initial assessments involving the whole family. In the experience of Bodega, families wholly incapable of helping the offender are a rare exception, making the program viable even in difficult cases where family members are themselves emotionally hurt or otherwise struggling. Recognizing that family members are experts in their own lives, case managers conduct "strengths-based" inquiries that "uncover positive behaviors, successful coping mechanisms, skills, and talents within the individual and the family network" (Shapiro & Schwarz, 2001, p. 55). In cooperation with the family, a case manager establishes goals and activities for the entire family network (e.g., a brother-in-law agrees to help the offender get a job) and makes social service referrals for family members when necessary. The Bodega Model operates in tandem with community supervision agencies; in the New York case, the State Division of Parole dedicated officers to work exclusively with Bodega staff.

Some modifications to current social policies will also benefit first-time adult-onset offenders. As of 2005, a total of 18 states had fully banned persons with felony drug convictions from receipt of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) benefits, and many others had imposed partial restrictions (General Accounting Office, 2005). A positive modification to TANF would be the exclusion of first-time offenders from the group of felons prohibited from receiving assistance. Also beneficial would be the extension of federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit to employers beyond the 1st year of offender employment. A third key social reform would be the modification of various federal, state, and local laws that prohibit offenders from residing in public housing to eliminate first offenders from their embrace. Notoriously known as "one-strike" policies (Human Rights Watch, 2004), such provisions can break up families and exacerbate the hardships of low-income employment.

This research has several limitations. By definition, the use of an adult community supervision cohort omits adolescence-limited offenders, thereby restricting the category of juvenile-onset offenders to juvenile persistent. The use of only probationers prohibits generalizability to all adult-onset offenders. The fact that the sample consisted of participants of varying ages, followed for a fixed period, meant that participants could not be tracked through the same age or over the same periods in their lives. Consequently, although "events in adulthood" variables were considered, this research could not adequately examine the sequelae of first-time adult-onset offending over the actual life course, which covers a greater expanse of years and experiences than either childhood or adolescence.

In addition, there was no use of self-reported criminal activity as a validity check on first offender status, nor could the research rule out the possibility that apparent adult-onset offenders accrued police contacts as youths that never made their way into any official juvenile history. Both quantity and timing of unreported criminal activity threaten the composition of the four criminal history groups studied here. The quantity issue potentially undermines the distinction between first-time and repeat offenders; the timing issue potentially undermines the distinction between juvenile and adult-onset offenders.

Owing to data limitations, the analyses also could not consider the amount of time elapsed since last offense, for either juvenile or repeat adult-onset categories. The inability to determine whether a participant's last offense occurred in the recent past obscures what may be consequential variability in all three repeat offender categories. In addition, the distinction between repeat adult-onset categories used in this study overlooks the greater commitment to antisocial behavior that may be manifest in not yet convicted individuals who have accrued many prior arrests, relative to offenders with just one or two convictions. Finally, although a very large state was used for this study, making it is reasonable to presume that most participants who reoffended did so within its borders, it is possible that not all of the arrests occurring out of state were recorded in the criminal history database.

There is a need for additional research on the first-time adult-onset offender that takes advantage of their large availability as participants in other corrections contexts, and which explores multiple measures of events in adulthood. For example, experimentation with different conceptualizations of unsatisfactory employment (e.g., no employment only vs. a hybrid measure that considers both unemployment and underemployment) may result in a set of measures that produces more reliable effects across samples and settings. Continued follow-up of samples from existing longitudinal research to later ages will also contribute to understanding of factors surrounding adult-onset offending, particularly if first-time adult-onset offenders are disaggregated from repeat adult-onset offenders to allow researchers to isolate factors that result in primary deviance. Use of uniform age cutoffs to distinguish adult-onset offending would benefit meta-analytic review of this body of research. Finally, interviews with first-time adult-onset offenders regarding circumstances leading up to their initial criminal event would likely yield important insights as well.

In conclusion, the onset and criminal careers of first-time adult-onset offenders are important subjects for study. This research uncovered significant differences between first-time and repeat adult-onset participants, indicating that adult-onset offenders, like their juvenile-onset counterparts, experience different trajectories of criminal activity. The emergence of employment and marital and family relations as dominant factors in first-time adult-onset offender recidivism highlighted targets for effective correctional interventions to help this group avoid further contacts with the criminal justice system. More research is needed to help understand the onset and criminal careers of persons whose first adjudications occur as adults, using data from both correctional and traditional longitudinal survey contexts.

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