

MAPPING THE LIFE-COURSE TRAJECTORIES OF WOMEN CONVICTED OF SERIOUS DRUG CRIME

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SERIOUS DRUG CRIME (SDC) – WHAT IS THAT?

„...importers, growers, manufacturers, or wholesalers who market large quantities of illicit drugs to other dealers.

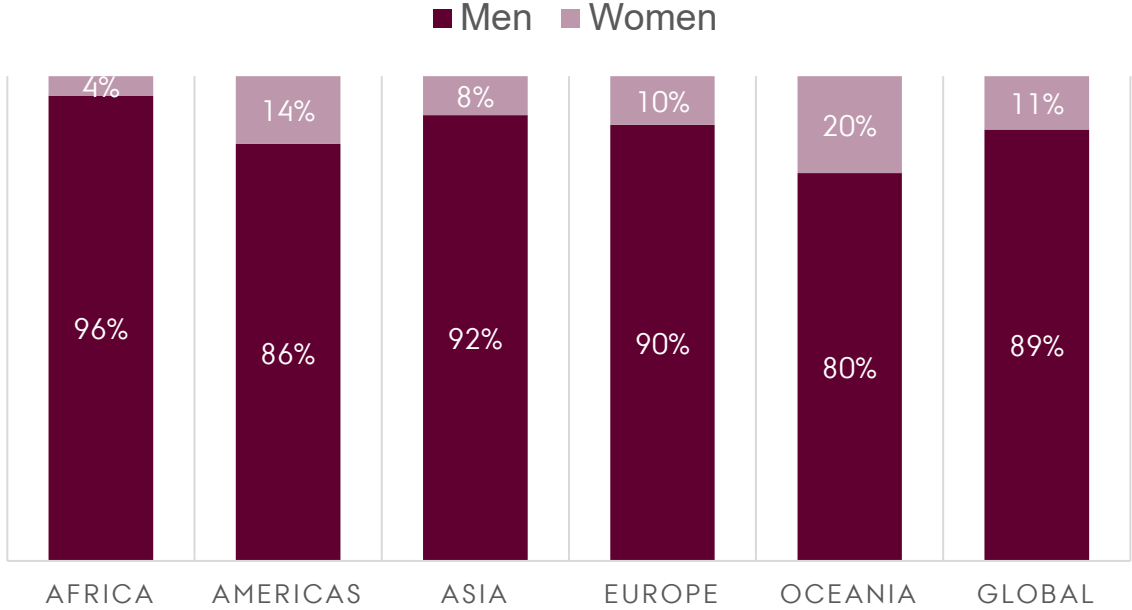
Desroches, 2007, s. 828

WHY STUDY WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN SDC?

- Are women involved in serious drug crime?
- What do we already know about the role of gender in drug markets?
- What do we already know about variation in offender characteristics across drug market levels?
- How can current knowledge about drug market actors be expanded?

ARE WOMEN INVOLVED IN SDC?

Figure 1 Share of women and men in people brought into formal contact with the criminal justice system on suspicion of drug trafficking offences (any drug), by region and at global level, 2019



United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2022). *Cocaine insights 3: Women in the cocaine supply*, p. 7.
https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/cocaine/Cocaine_Insights3_2022.pdf

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE ROLE OF GENDER IN DRUG MARKETS?

- Gender structures in drug markets often constrain and disadvantage women (e.g., Grundetjern & Sandberg, 2012)
- Yet, women still enter the drug economy, and they often do so in gendered ways
 - The feminization of poverty (e.g., Fleetwood, 2014; del Olmo, 1990)
 - Male drug traffickers' exploitation of women in their social network (e.g., Bailey, 2013)
 - Women's romantic or familial relationships with men who are involved in drug crime (e.g., Bourgois, 2003; Campbell, 2008; Gillespie et al., 2024)

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT VARIATION ACROSS DRUG MARKET LEVELS?

Studies have generally highlighted differences between individuals who operate at the lowest level of drug markets and individuals involved in SDC

Although disagreement exists...

- Individuals who commit SDC are often portrayed as rational, “business criminals” who are motivated by profit (Desroches, 2007; e.g., Adler, 1985)
- Low-level drug crime is often described as the product of socio-economic marginalization (e.g., Bourgois, 2003; Dunlap et al., 2010), dependent drug use (e.g., Pearson, 2007), or as an extension of (recreational) drug use (e.g., Taylor & Potter, 2013; Søggaard & Bræmer, 2023)

HOW CAN CURRENT KNOWLEDGE ABOUT DRUG MARKET ACTORS BE EXPANDED?

...by focusing specifically on *women's* involvement in *serious drug crime*

- Prior research has almost entirely focused on...
 - Men
 - Women's involvement in less serious drug crimes

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

What can life-course criminology offer to the study of women's involvement in SDC?

SDC FROM A LIFE-COURSE PERSPECTIVE

Key concepts: Criminal career, trajectories, and turning points

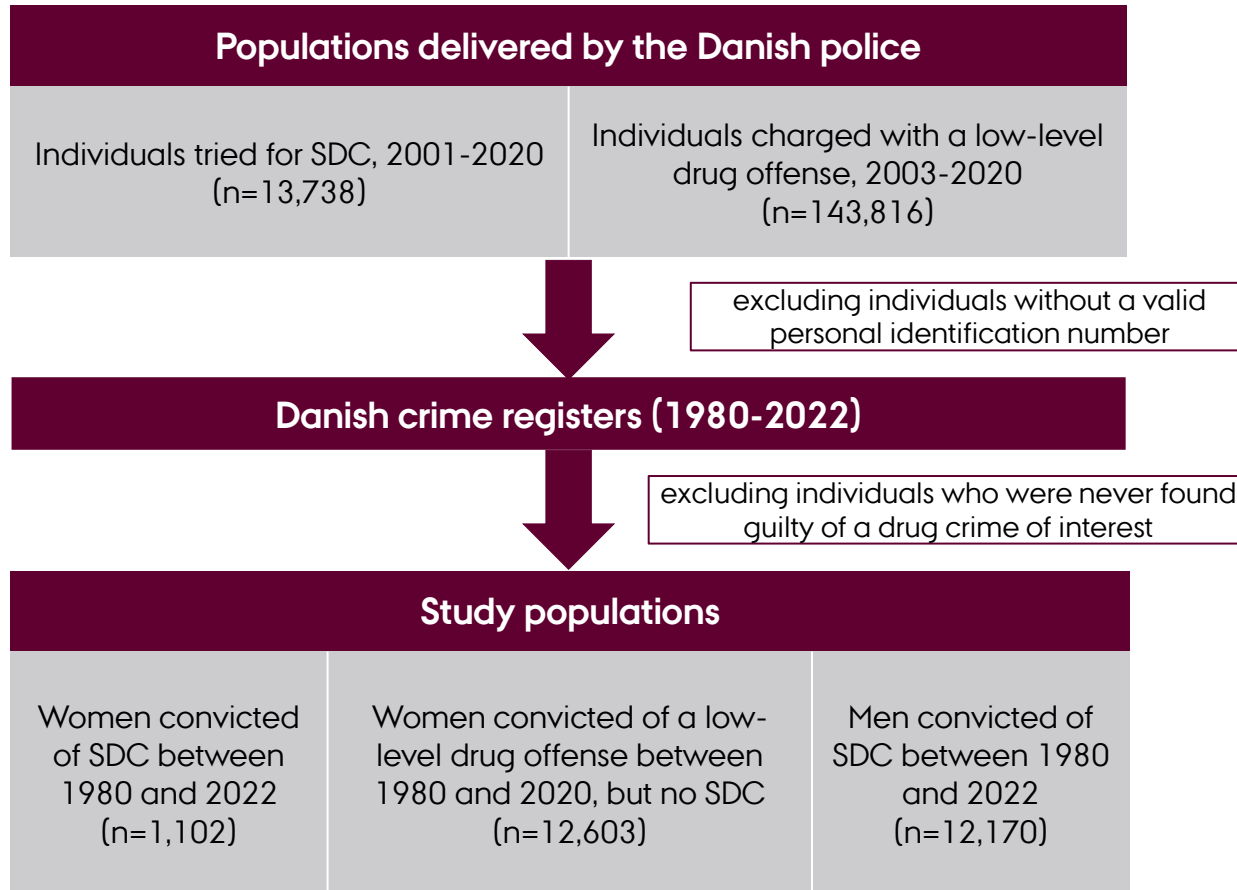
- Inspired by a series of Dutch studies on criminal trajectories in organized crime (conducted by van Koppen, de Poot, Kleemans, Nieuwbeerta, Blokland)
 - Find a significant proportion of adult-onset offenders
 - Highlight the need for theoretical developments beyond the ‘ordinary’ street offender

What can life-course criminology offer?

- Attentiveness to the importance of timing
- Heterogeneity within offender populations
- Study criminal behavior across the entire life course

DATA AND METHOD

POPULATIONS AND METHOD



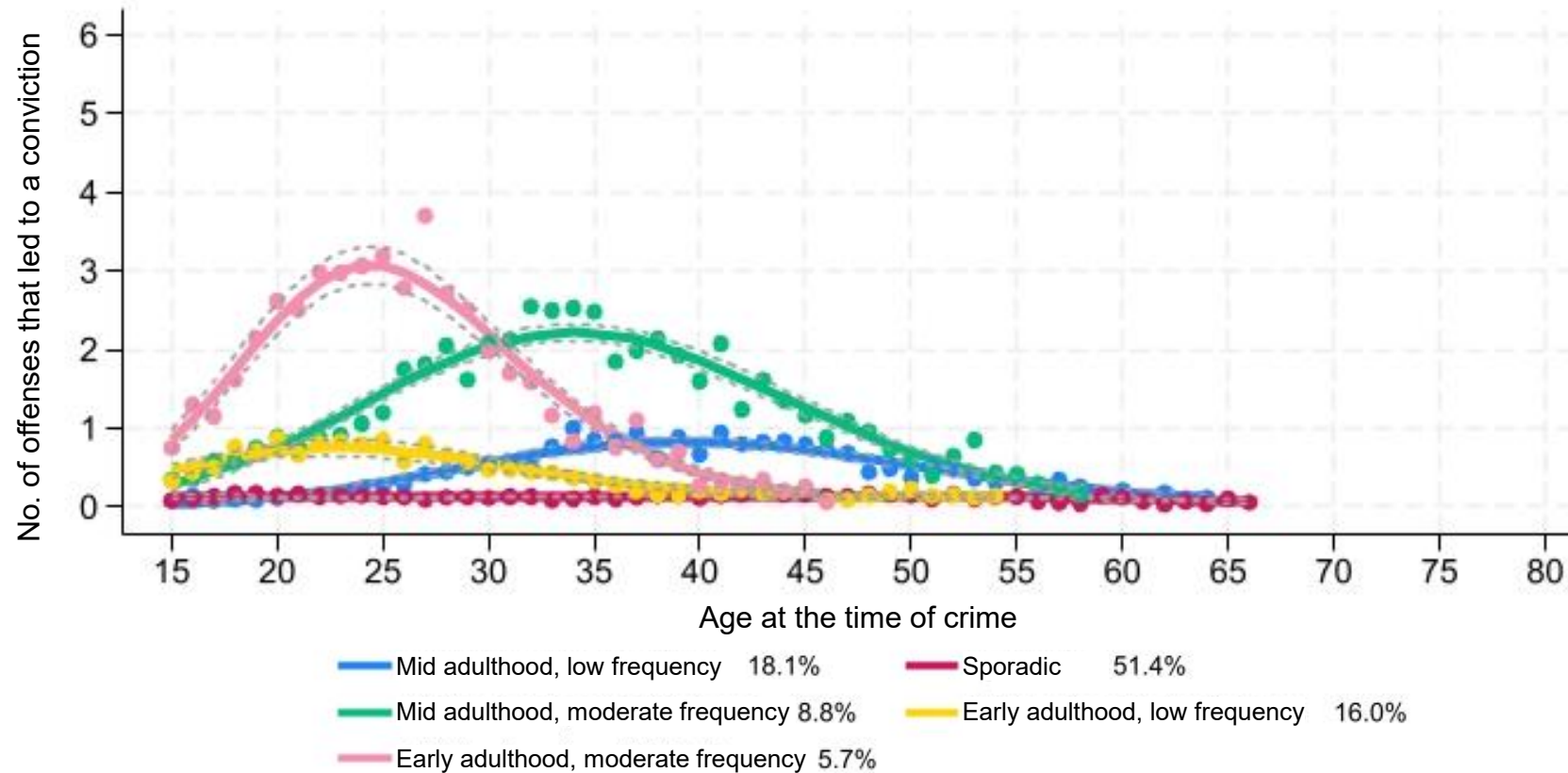
Group-based trajectory modelling

Identifies groups of individuals based on the timing and frequency of these individuals (criminal) behavior across time

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

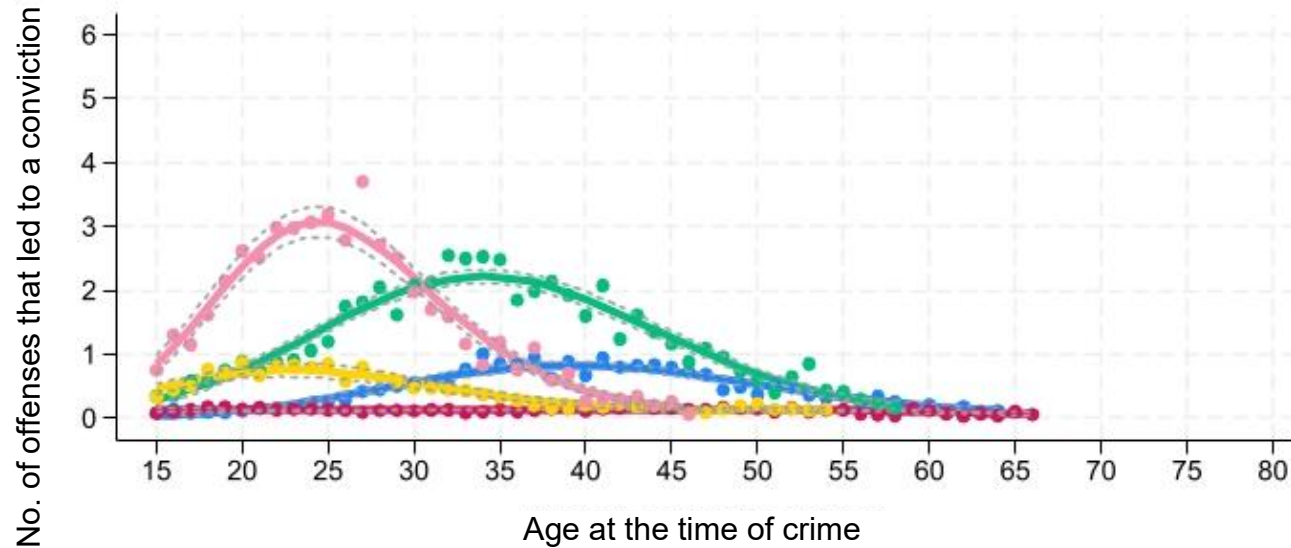
PRELIMINARY RESULTS: CRIMINAL TRAJECTORIES OF WOMEN CONVICTED OF SDC

Figure 3 Criminal trajectories among women convicted of SDC (n=1,102)



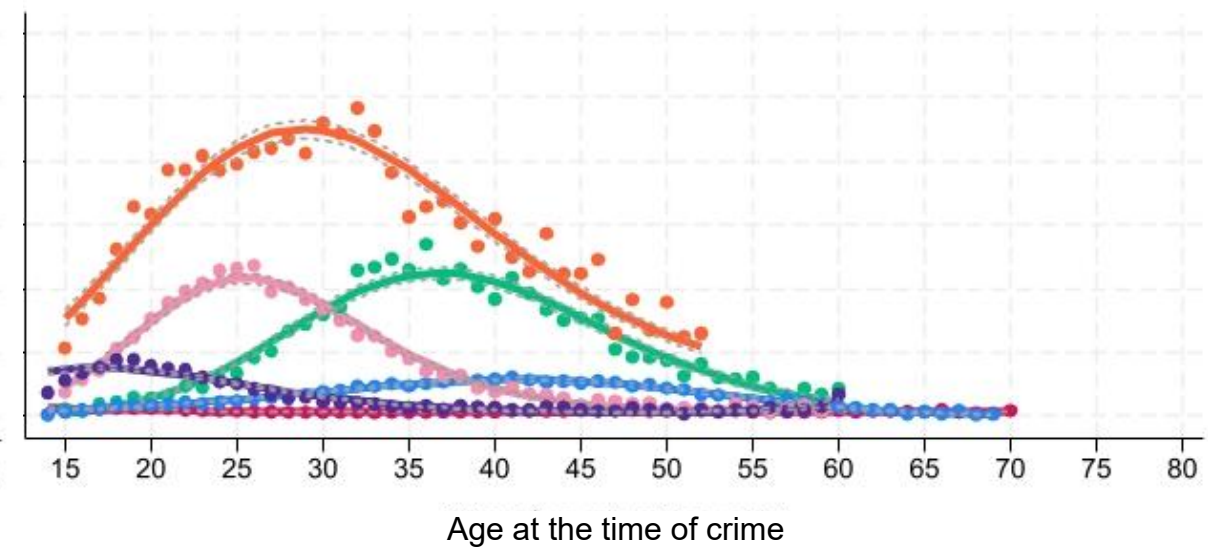
PRELIMINARY RESULTS: DOES THE DEGREE OF SERIOUSNESS MATTER?

Figure 3 Criminal trajectories among women convicted of SDC (n=1,102)



- Mid adulthood, low frequency 18.1%
- Mid adulthood, moderate frequency 8.8%
- Early adulthood, moderate frequency 5.7%
- Sporadic 51.4%
- Early adulthood, low frequency 16.0%

Figure 4 Criminal trajectories among women convicted of a low-level drug crime (n=12,603)



- Mid adulthood, moderate frequency 2.8%
- Mid adulthood, low frequency 13.4%
- Teenage, low frequency 11.1%
- Sporadic 68.0%
- Early adulthood, moderate frequency 3.6%
- Chronic, high frequency 1.1%

PRELIMINARY RESULTS: DOES GENDER MATTER?

Figure 3 Criminal trajectories among women convicted of SDC (n=1,102)

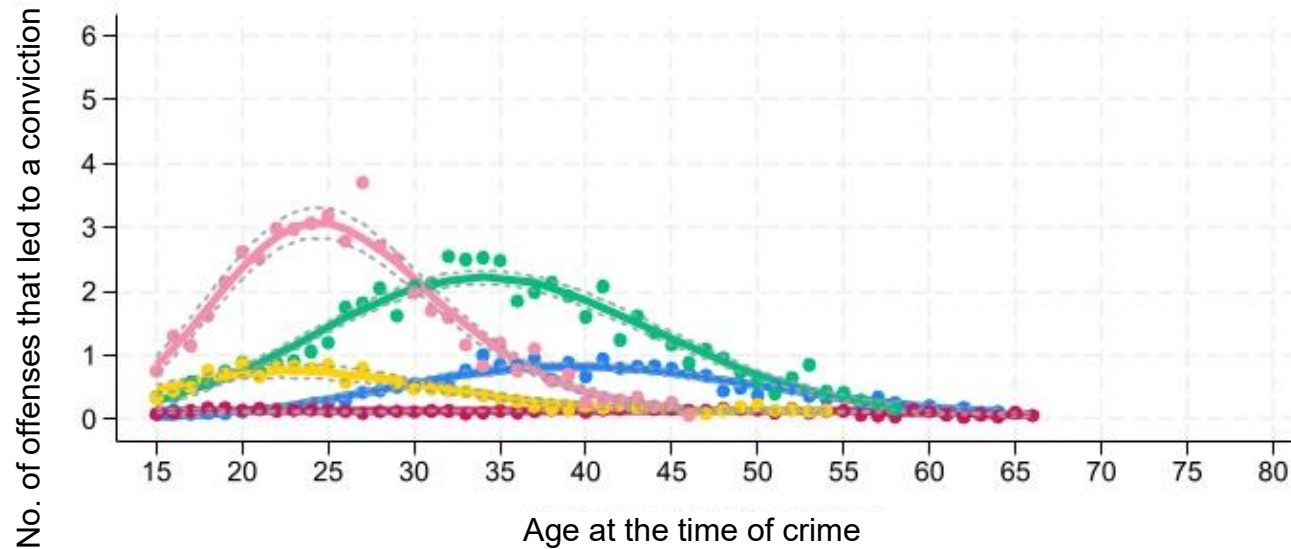
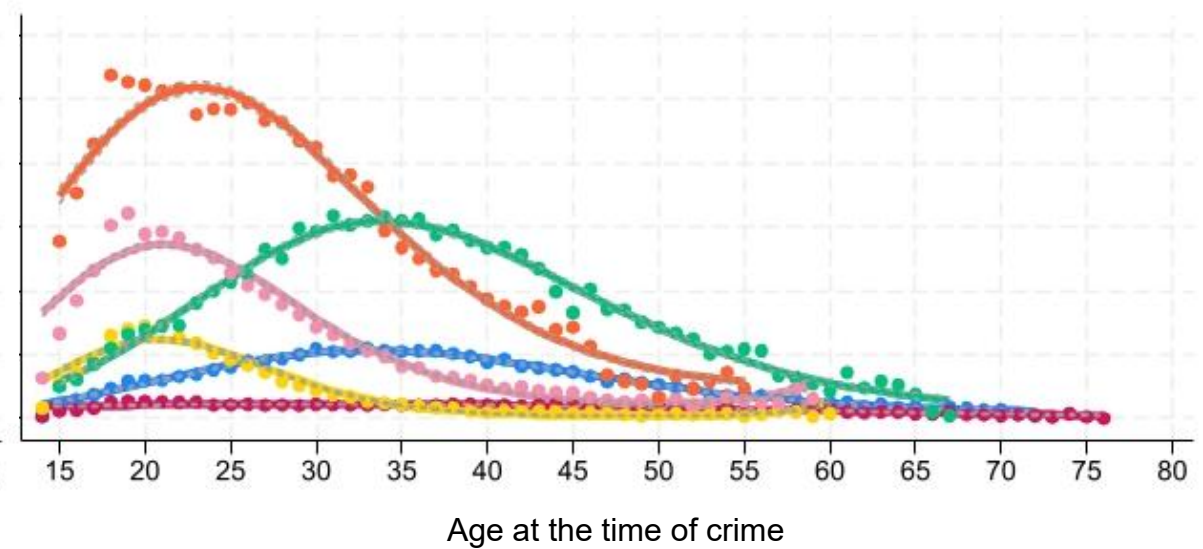


Figure 5 Criminal trajectories among men convicted of SDC (n=12,170)



- Mid adulthood, low frequency 18.1%
- Mid adulthood, moderate frequency 8.8%
- Early adulthood, moderate frequency 5.7%
- Sporadic 51.4%
- Early adulthood, low frequency 16.0%

- Mid adulthood, low frequency 19.2%
- Early adulthood, low frequency 21.8%
- Early adulthood, moderate frequency 13.1%
- Sporadic 36.2%
- Mid adulthood, moderate frequency 6.1%
- Early adulthood, high frequency 3.6%

CONCLUDING REMARKS

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Limitations of results

- No control for potential cohort and period effects
- No control for periods off-risk (including incarceration spells, and immigration and migration)

Implications for further work

- A lot of variation within populations
- Overlap between populations
- Importance of focusing on adulthood



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APPENDIX I: LITERATURE

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APPENDIX II: DUTCH STUDIES

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