An examination of the interaction between morality and self-control in offending: A study of young people in Malmö

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Introduction

- **Self-control important predictor of offending**
  - In many different studies (see overview by Pratt & Cullen, 2000)
  - Both in Self-Control Theory (Gottfredson & Hirschi; 1990 & Integrated theories such as Farrington's ICAP, Wikström's SAT, Colvin's Coercion Theory (2000)
- **Morality (moral beliefs) important predictor**
  - In many different studies (Vaszonyi et al, 2006; Wiatrowski et al, 1980,...)
  - Important in many theories like social (cognitive) learning, control theories (Hirschi, 1969; Matza, 1959; Laub & Sampson, 2004,...)
- **Morality as moderator for the effect of self-control**
- Many scholars argue that moderator effects are an important issue to address (Agnew, 2003;

The model: Situational Action Theory

Main argument:

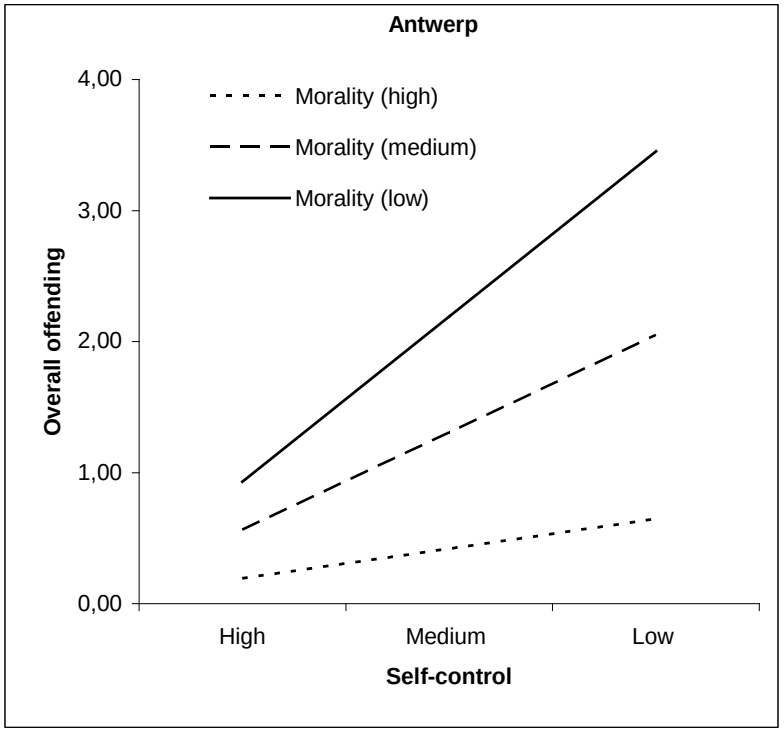
- **Poor moral standards is the main cause of rule-breaking.**
- **High morality – dont see crime as an option and no crime**
- **Low morality – see crime as an option and crime can emerge in situations (intersection between individual and setting)**
- **Self-control: Different concept in SAT, not a trait, but a situational characteristic**
- **Difference between self-control (which is activated i situations) and the ability to exercise (which is caused by executuve function, See Wikström & Treiber, 2007)**
- **The present study: ability to exercise self-control**

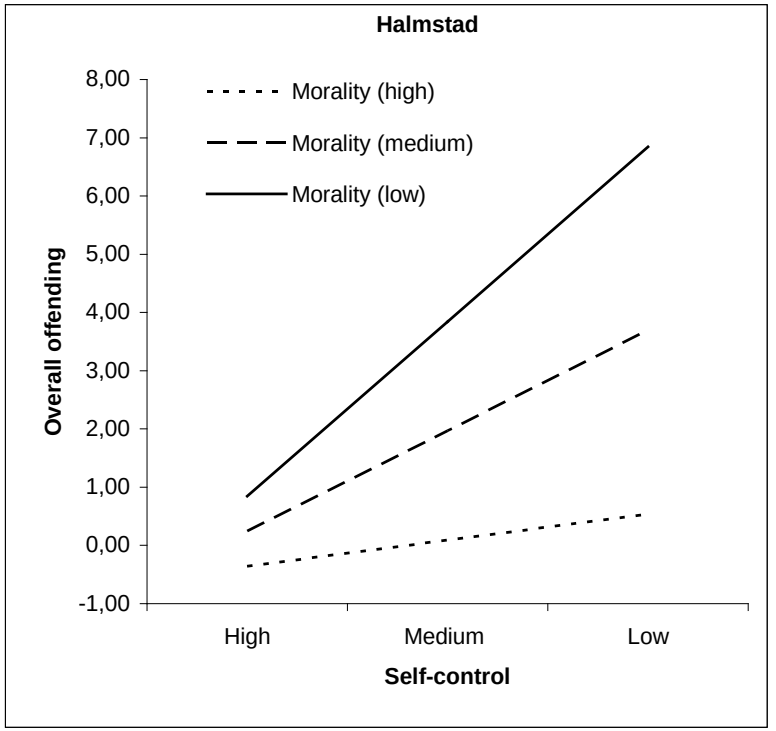
The model: Situational Action Theory

- **<u>The Principle of the Conditional Relevance of Controls</u>**
- **”A persons ability to exercise self-control (internal controls) and deterrence (external controls) is only causally relevant when there is a discrepancy between a persons moral rules and the moral rules of the setting in which they take part) as regards carrying out a partiucular action.”**
- **This study looks at the interaction between the ability to exercise self-control & morality**

Previous studies on the interaction between morality and Self-control

- **Overview: See Svensson, Pauwels & Weerman (2010)**





The Malmö Individual and Neighbourhood Development Study (MINDS): The project & the data

- Panel design (up to young adulthood) in Malmö
- Theory-driven
- Based on self-reports (no official records)
- Comparative (UK-Peterborough/PADS+)
- Funded by the Swedish Scientific Council, 2010-2016

MINDS - Overall Aim

To

- **contribute to the understanding of the causes and prevention of young people's crime involvement**

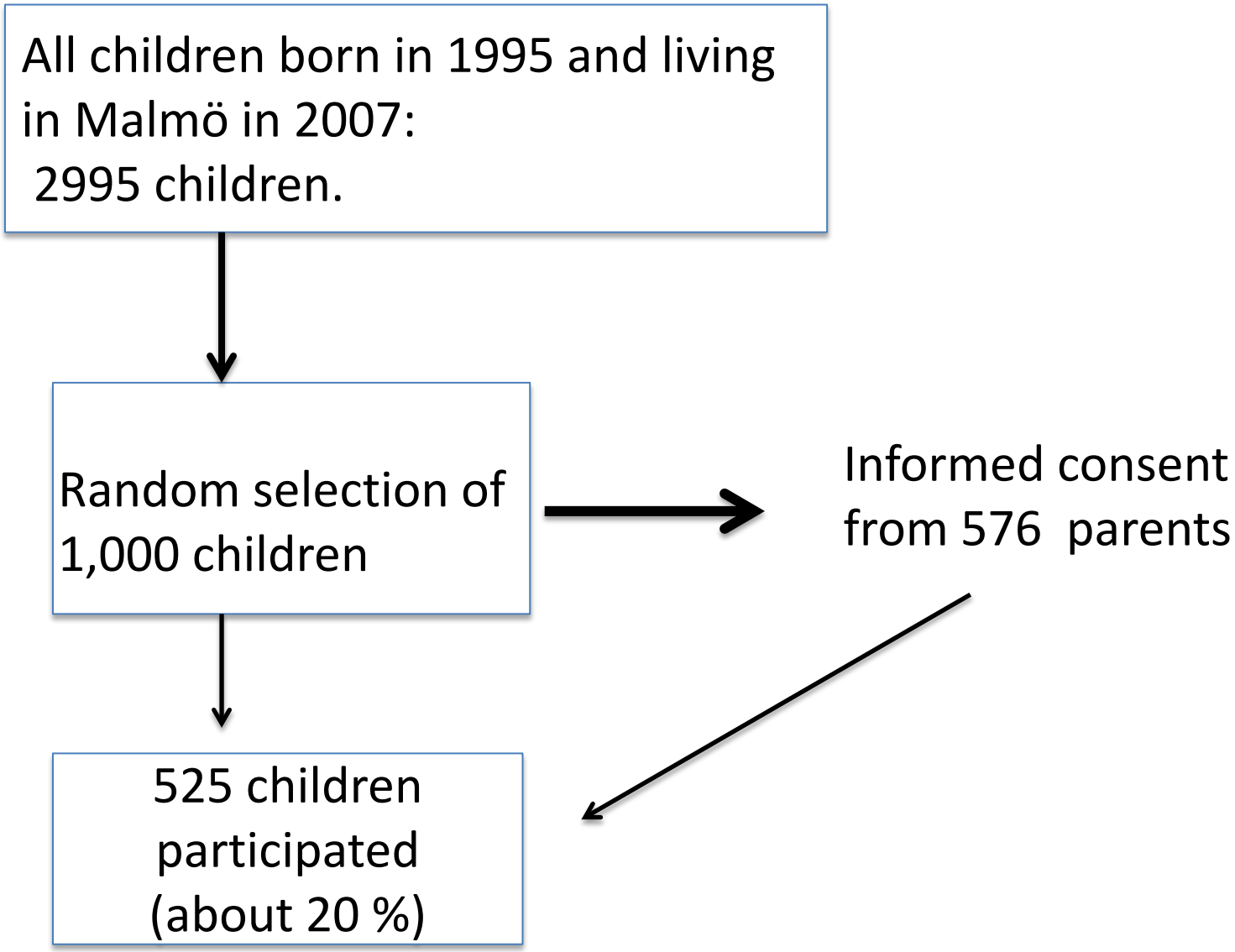
- **by studying the interaction between individual characteristics and experiences and the features of the environments in which young people interact.**

Design

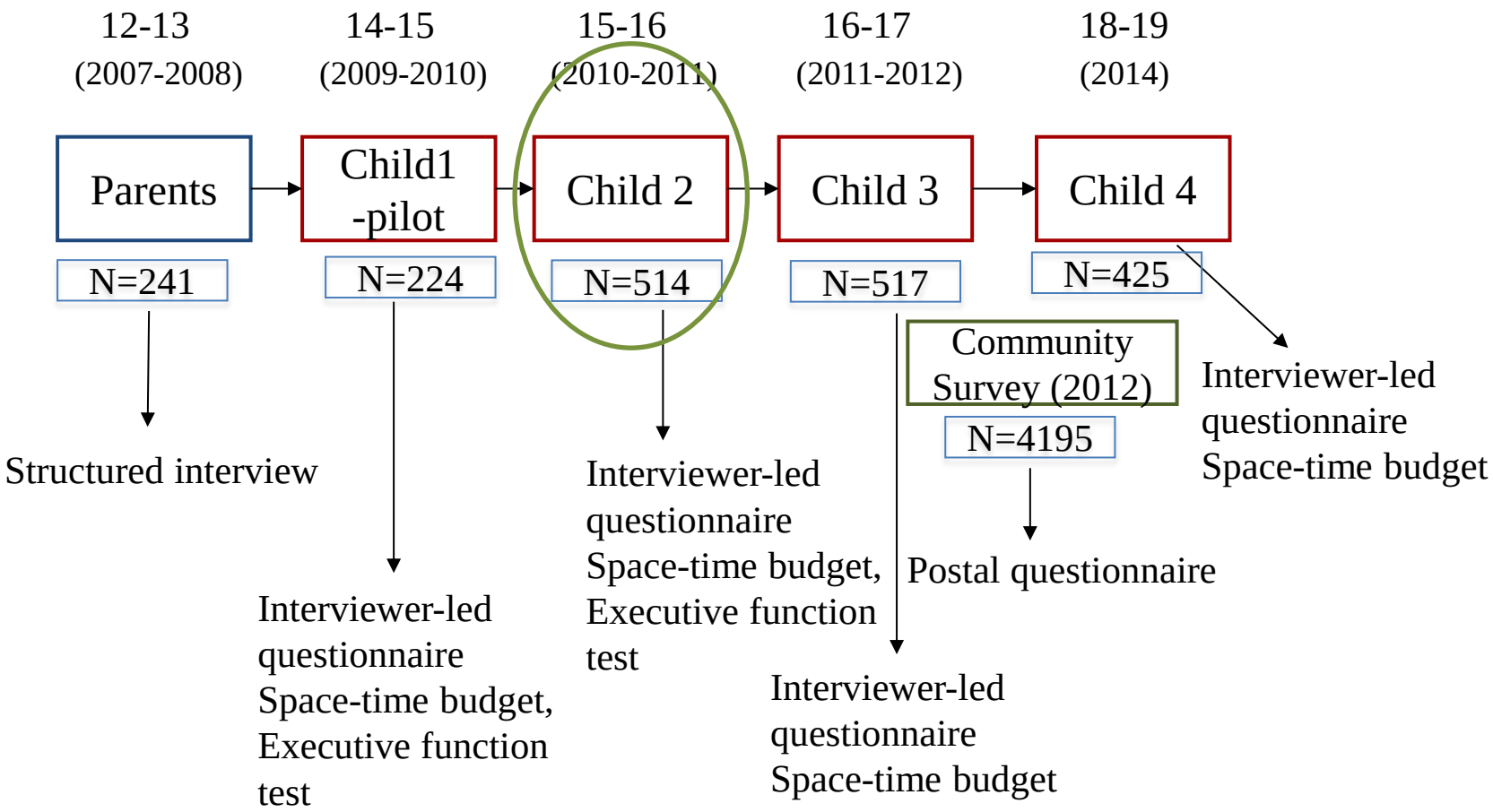
Longitudinal study of 525 adolescents born in 1995 and residing in Malmö in 2007.

MINDS is modelled on the Peterborough Adolescent and Young Adult Development Study (PADS+), Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge (Wikström et al., 2012).

Sampling frame and sampling



Data and methods



Measures of Personal morality + Ability to exercise self-control

- Personal morality – sum of 16 items (e.g. how wrong is it for someone your age to…Ride a bike through a red light/Skip doing homework/Get drunk with friends on a Friday evening/Use a weapon or force to get money).

Scale reliability alpha (α) T2 0.86/T3 0.84

- Ability to exercise self-control –sum of 8 items (e.g. I never think about what will happen to me in the future/I lose my temper pretty easily/I easily get bored with things)

Scale reliability alpha (α) T2 0.71/T3 0.70

= Crime propensity

Crime Involvement

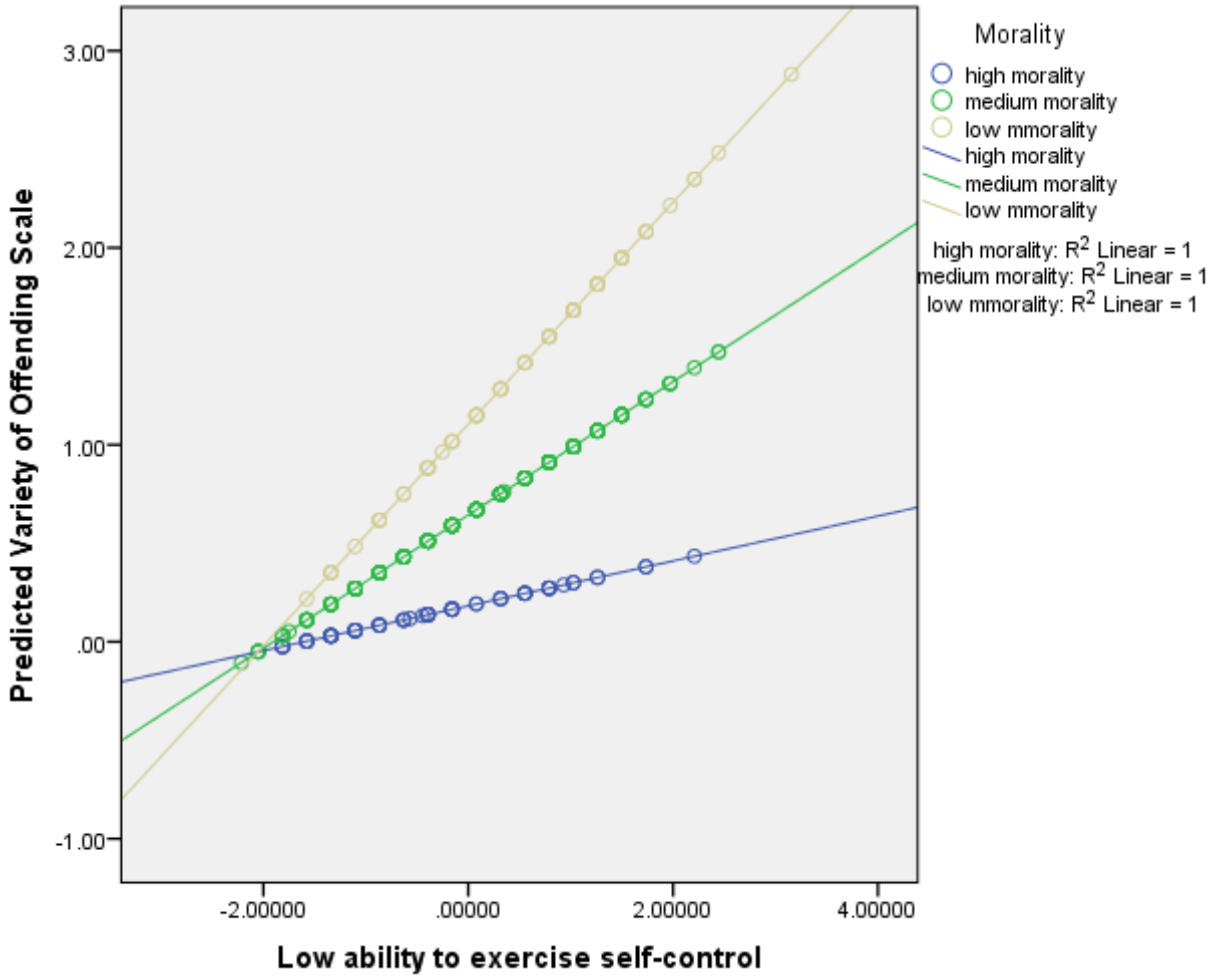
Variety scale by number of offence types committed preceding school year:

Shoplifting
Theft from a person
Assault
Robbery
Residential burglary
Non-residential burglary
Theft of/from a car
Vandalism
Arson

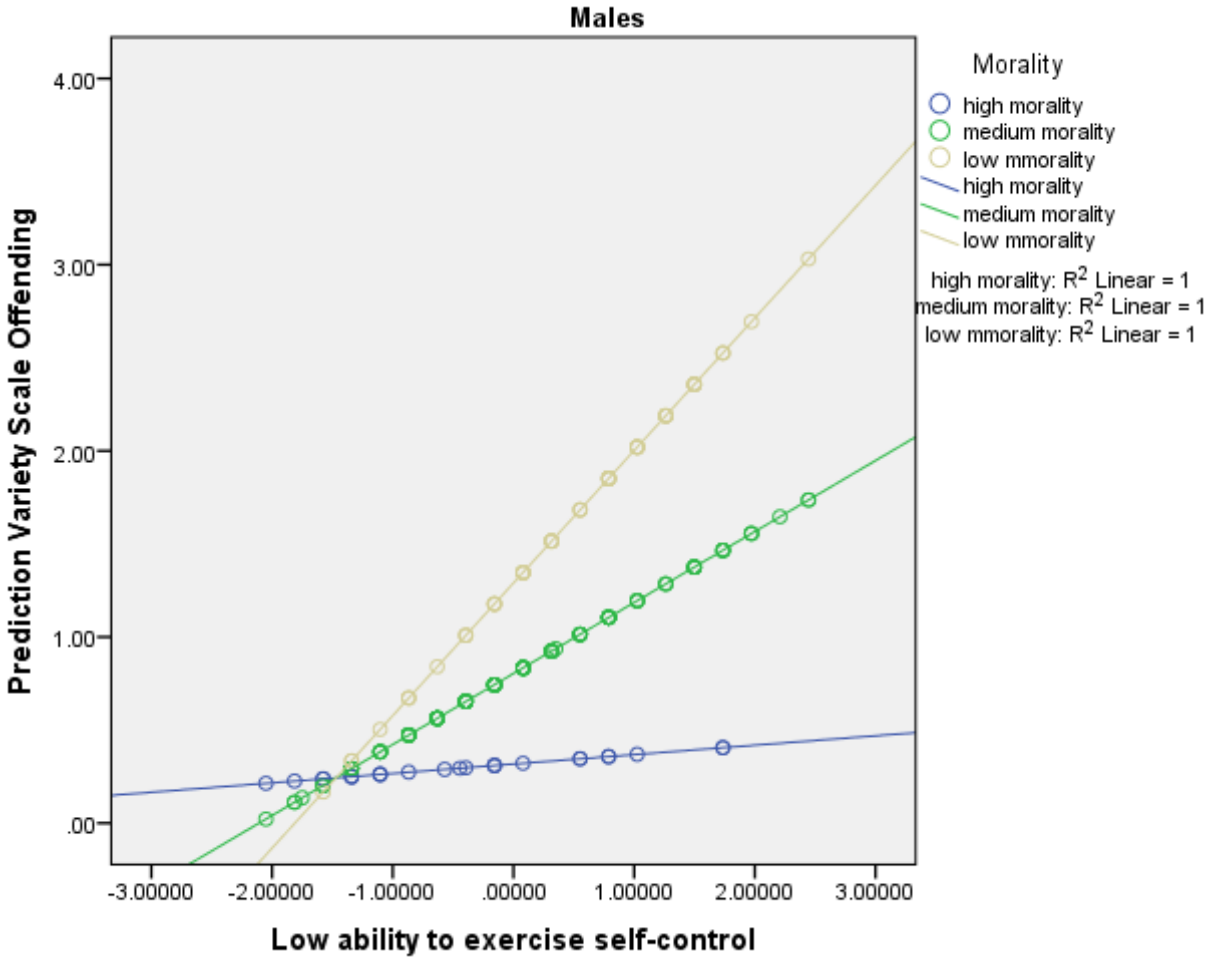
Results

Parameter Estimates (Generalized linear Modelling)							
			95% Wald Confidence Interval		Hypothesis Test		
Parameter	**B**	Std. Error	Lower	Upper	Wald Chi-Square	df	Sig.
(Intercept)	**1.221**	.1406	.945	1.496	75.327	1	**.000**
Low Self-control	**.332**	.0453	.243	.420	53.641	1	**.000**
Low Morality (3)	**.403**	.0793	.247	.558	25.813	1	**.000**
Interaction term	**.225**	.0726	.082	.367	9.590	1	**.002**
Gender (females)	**-.383**	.0886	-.557	-.210	18.720	1	**.000**

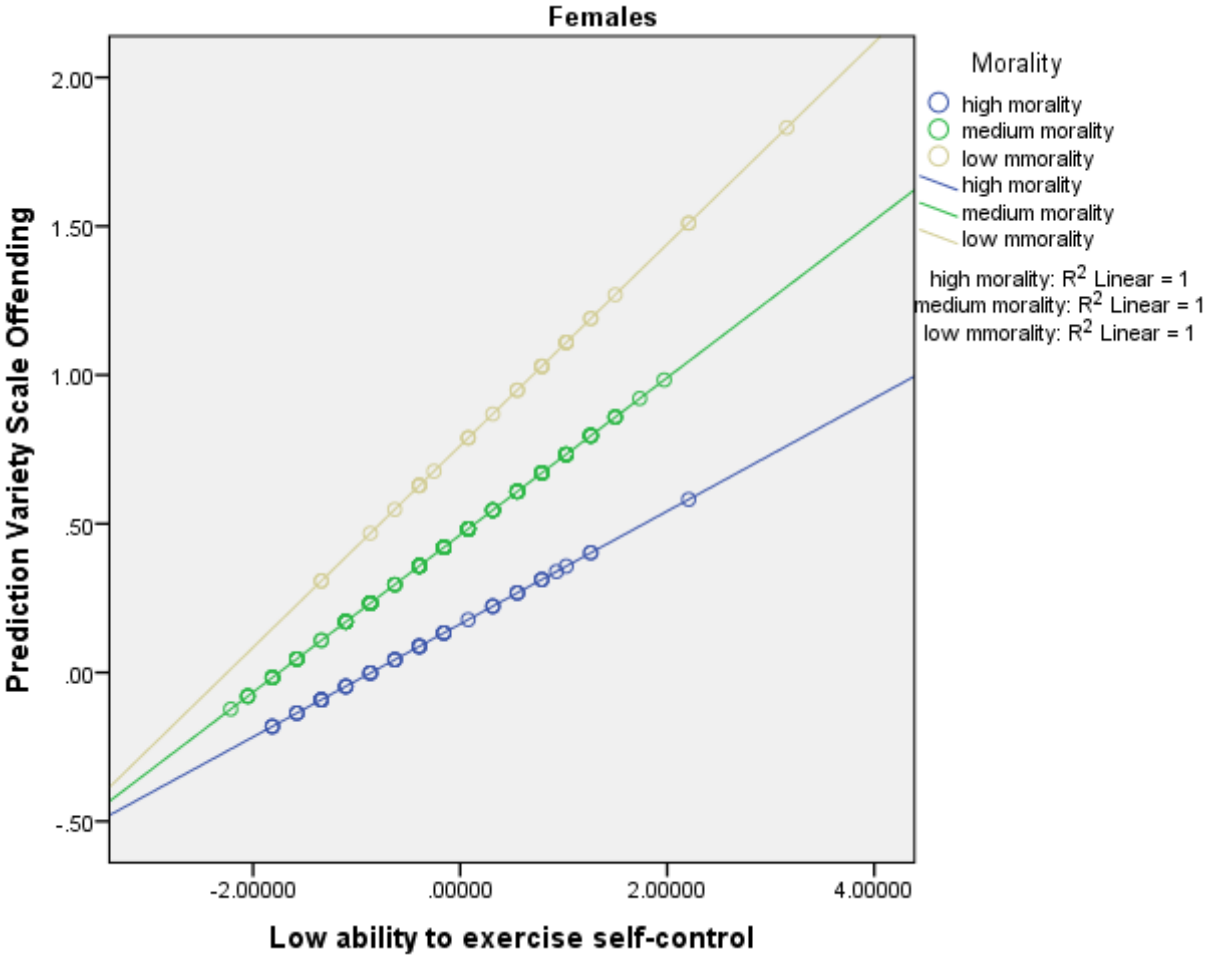
Results


Predicted Variety of Offending Scale
3.00
2.00
1.00
.00
-1.00
-2.00000
.00000
2.00000
4.00000
Low ability to exercise self-control
Morality
high morality
medium morality
low mmorality
high morality
medium morality
low mmorality
high morality: R2 Linear = 1
medium morality: R2 Linear = 1
low mmorality: R2 Linear = 1

Results


Males
Prediction Variety Scale Offending
4.00
3.00
2.00
1.00
.00
-3.00000
-2.00000
-1.00000
.00000
1.00000
2.00000
3.00000
Low ability to exercise self-control
Morality
high morality
medium morality
low mmorality
high morality
medium morality
low mmorality
high morality: R2 Linear = 1
medium morality: R2 Linear = 1
low mmorality: R2 Linear = 1

Results


Females
Prediction Variety Scale Offending
2.00
1.50
1.00
.50
.00
-.50
-2.00000
.00000
2.00000
4.00000
Low ability to exercise self-control
Morality
high morality
medium morality
low mmorality
high morality
medium morality
low mmorality
high morality: R2 Linear = 1
medium morality: R2 Linear = 1
low mmorality: R2 Linear = 1

Results

Parameter Estimates (Generalized Linear Modelling)							
			95% Wald Confidence Interval		Hypothesis Test		
Parameter	B	Std. Error	Lower	Upper	Wald Chi-Square	df	Sig.
(Intercept)	1.145	.1435	.864	1.427	63.691	1	.000
Low Self-control	.498	.1433	.217	.779	12.085	1	.001
Low Morality	.673	.2490	.185	1.161	7.296	1	.007
Interaction morality * Self-control	.587	.2304	.135	1.039	6.489	1	.011
Gender	-.341	.0904	-.519	-.164	14.276	1	.000
LSC*Gender	-.117	.0904	-.294	.060	1.676	1	.195
Low Morality * Gender	-.187	.1576	-.495	.122	1.400	1	.237
LSC*Gender*Low Morality	-.256	.1455	-.541	.029	3.101	1	.078

Summary of findings

- **Bivariate effect of gender is reduced when morality and low self-control are taken into account**
- **Both morality and self-control are important predictor of self-reported offending (morality > low self-control)**
- **Morality and self-control interact in the explanation of offending – indicating that the effect of self-control on offending is significantly more related with offending for individuals with low morality**
- **The pattern exists in males and females**
- **Although the pattern is somewhat more pronounced in boys, there is NO significant three-way interaction (i.e. the differential effect of low self-control does not differ significantly by gender).**

Conclusion and discussion

- **This is a preliminary test**
- **Measures of morality should include moral emotions & anticipated shame and guilt**
- **Next step – explore STB-data to test PEA-hypothesis**

Appendix

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, N=481

	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Girls	-			
2. Moral values	-.20***	-		
3. Self-control	-.08	.34***	-	
4. Crime (variety)	-.24***	.37***	.38***	-
Min, Max	0, 1	2, 48	1.30, 24	0, 8
Mean	.50	22.77	10.67	.69
SD	-	7.14	4.22	1.10

***p<.001.

Appendix

OLS regression analysis predicting crime, N=481

	Beta	Beta	Beta
Girls	**-.24**	**-.17**	**-.17**
Moral values		**.24**	**.22**
Self-control		**.28**	**.30**
Moral values*Self-control			**.13**
R2	**0.06**	**0.24**	**0.26**

Note: The significant levels are based on Robust Standard Errors. VIF=1.20.
In Bold: $p < 0.01$