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 – don’t 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 in situations) and the ability to exercise (which is caused by executive function, See Wikström & Treiber, 2007)
• The present study: ability to exercise self-control
The model: Situational Action Theory

• **The Principle of the Conditional Relevance of Controls**

• “A person’s ability to exercise self-control (internal controls) and deterrence (external controls) is only causally relevant when there is a discrepancy between a person’s moral rules and the moral rules of the setting in which they take part) as regards carrying out a particular 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

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/PADES+)
- 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


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


Random selection of 1,000 children

525 children participated (about 20%)

Informed consent from 576 parents
Data and methods

Parents

Child 1 - pilot

Child 2

Child 3

Child 4

Structured interview

Interviewer-led questionnaire

Space-time budget

Executive function test

Interviewer-led questionnaire

Space-time budget

Executive function test

Community Survey (2012)

Postal questionnaire

Interviewer-led questionnaire

Space-time budget

N=241

N=224

N=514

N=517

N=425

N=4195
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter (Intercept)</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>Wald Chi-Square</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Self-control</td>
<td>.332</td>
<td>.0453</td>
<td>.243</td>
<td>.420</td>
<td>53.641</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low Morality (3)</td>
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<td>.0793</td>
<td>.247</td>
<td>.558</td>
<td>25.813</td>
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<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender (females)</td>
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<td>.0886</td>
<td>-.557</td>
<td>-.210</td>
<td>18.720</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
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</table>
Results
Results
Results

![Graph showing the relationship between morality and self-control in females. The graph plots the predicted variety scale offending against low ability to exercise self-control for three levels of morality: high, medium, and low. Each level is represented by a different line and marker. The graph includes annotations for the R² values for the linear relationship for each morality level: high morality (R² Linear = 1), medium morality (R² Linear = 1), and low morality (R² Linear = 1).]
### Results

**Parameter Estimates (Generalized Linear Modelling)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>95% Wald Confidence Interval</th>
<th>Hypothesis Test</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Intercept)</td>
<td>1.145</td>
<td>0.1435</td>
<td>0.864 1.427</td>
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<td>0.1433</td>
<td>0.217 0.779</td>
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<td>Low Morality</td>
<td>0.673</td>
<td>0.2490</td>
<td>0.185 1.161</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interaction morality * Self-control</td>
<td>0.587</td>
<td>0.2304</td>
<td>0.135 1.039</td>
<td>6.489 1 0.011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>0.0904</td>
<td>-0.519 -0.164</td>
<td>14.276 1 0.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSC*Gender</td>
<td>-0.117</td>
<td>0.0904</td>
<td>-0.294 0.060</td>
<td>1.676 1 0.195</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low Morality * Gender</td>
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<td>0.1576</td>
<td>-0.495 0.122</td>
<td>1.400 1 0.237</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSC<em>Gender</em>Low Morality</td>
<td>-0.256</td>
<td>0.1455</td>
<td>-0.541 0.029</td>
<td>3.101 1 0.078</td>
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</table>
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
Table 1. Descriptive statistics, N=481

<table>
<thead>
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<th>2.</th>
<th>3.</th>
<th>4.</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1. Girls</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>2. Moral values</td>
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<td>3. Self-control</td>
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<td>4. Crime (variety)</td>
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<td>.37***</td>
<td>.38***</td>
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<td>Min, Max</td>
<td>0, 1</td>
<td>2, 48</td>
<td>1.30, 24</td>
<td>0, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
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<td>22.77</td>
<td>10.67</td>
<td>.69</td>
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<tr>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>7.14</td>
<td>4.22</td>
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</table>

***p<.001.
### Appendix

OLS regression analysis predicting crime, N=481

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Beta</th>
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<tr>
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<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moral values</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-control</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moral values*Self-control</td>
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<td>.13</td>
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<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td><strong>0.06</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.24</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.26</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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